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AMERICAN CROSS-SECTION:

The Typical Development of an American Family

by

Theodore Ellery Merritt

1667569

8055 William St.
Castro Valley, Calif.
December 6, 1953

The Newberry Library
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Illinois

Gentlemen:

As my Merritt kin no longer reside at 1958 42nd Ave., Oakland, Calif., will you please place this letter in the front of my MS., American Cross-Section, so that anyone wishing to contact me, may do so at the Castro Valley address, above.

I cordially welcome correspondence with any person interested in some aspect of my manuscript. Believing its contents to be of value, as family and local history, and indeed as the story of a typical American family, it is my great desire to see it published. I invite, therefore, any suggestions for publication, under any satisfactory auspices. I can always be reached at the permanent address of a brother: 8055 William St., Castro Valley, Calif.

Thanking you, I am

Yours very truly,
Theodore E. Merritt
Theodore E. Merritt

FOREWORD:

It would be difficult to determine just when this record, of what seems to me a rather typical American family, had its inception in the author's mind. All my life I have listened with great pleasure to the reminiscences of my elders — particularly of my mother and father. But it was only ~~a year or so ago,~~ after some of these pages had been written, that the idea came to write for a larger audience than that of nephews, nieces, and the progeny of these. As I continued what was intended at first to be only a family chronicle, the urge developed to write a sort of Saga of An Average American Family. This idea grew with much reading of old journals, local histories, and the like. (I hope I may be forgiven my frequent quoting from these and not be charged, as Timothy Flint, in Recollections of the Last Ten Years, charged his contemporaries, with "the common fashion of emptying the contents of one book into another.")

I believe the story of almost any American family, if adequately told, would form an enjoyable cross-section of American life and history. It may be objected that a truly typical family, during several generations of growth, would develop now and then, in a land of general opportunity, a son or daughter of some distinction. There may be much truth in this. If so, the above theory falls down in the case of my own fam-

ily, for the reader will find in those pages no more exalted personages than the crossroads blacksmith and the village cobbler. But on the other hand, would not the history of the Lincoln family, for instance, in its progress with the westward-pushing American frontier and backwoods, still be representative and interesting if it had not included the attainments of its one supremely great son and those of his relatives of lesser but still considerable distinction?

There is a curious quirk in my mental processes that has always caused me to find less delight in the text itself of a history, a biography, or a book of travel, than in the footnotes thereto. These, as it were, "get down to brass tacks." It is as a humble footnote to American history that I have written this account of my family's development; as such I submit it to the general reader. Among my ancestors is to be found not one Signer of the Declaration of Independence! Yet who is to say how little or how great was the pressure given that Declaration and its Signers by those forgotten lovers of liberty who were the now nameless ancestors of the average contemporary American? At the very hour of the signing of our Declaration of Independence, a typical footnote to American history was being written by the lowly Scotch-Irish of western Pennsylvania. An account is to be found in the Proceedings of The Scotch-Irish Society of America (Fifth — 1896 — Congress, published by the Society, Nashville, Tenn., 1897).

At that Congress, John F. Meginness, in an address on "The Scotch-Irish of the Upper Susquehanna Valley," said: "When they (the Scotch-Irish of that region) learned that the question of declaring the colonies independent of Great Britian was under discussion in Congress, they resolved on giving an expression of their sentiments to encourage that body. Consequently, a public meeting was called (purely by coincidence) for July 4, 1776, on the plains of Pine Creek. . . . It was a remarkable coincidence -- remarkable for the fact that at the moment that the Continental Congress was signing the immortal document, the Scotch-Irish squatter sovereigns, in convention assembled . . . , were declaring by solemn resolution for freedom and independence at the same time. More than two hundred miles intervened between the two points. There was no telegraphic communication at that time; neither party had any knowledge of what the other was doing. . . . Only the names of a few of those who took part in this meeting have come down to us -- viz., Thomas, Francis, and John Clarke, Alexander Donaldson, William Campbell, Alexander Hamilton, John Jackson, Adam Carson, Henry McCracken, Adam De Witt, Robert Love, and Hugh Nichols. There were others, no doubt, but their names have been lost. Several of these patriots afterwards perished at the hands of the savages. . . . Their names are worthy of being immortalized." Yet this is but a sort of footnote-to-a-footnote to American history.

Some of my closest relatives may remark the inconsistency

of a family narrative's being written by one who has often questioned the generally accepted virtue of the Family as an institution. Has one who sometimes protests the entanglements of the family relationship, as perhaps not worth the cost to individual independence and development, has such a one the right to glorify those relationships? Much as I sometimes deplore the binding duties of mother to son, or vice versa (an extreme case of the Oedipus complex is the postman who refuses to cancel the current Mother's Day stamps because he feels this to be a lack of reverence for his own mother!); valueless as I often find the purely accidental relationship of brothers whose natures actually repel each other, thus creating a situation of continuous insincerity; sad as I find the often very false ties between father and son, calling upon each for loyalties which, it may be, neither feels -- in spite of all this, I also sometimes see the great beauty of the family bond: the faithful devotion of a mother to a loved daughter; the occasional sound comradeship between father and son; and, especially, the frequently very fine spirit of the clan. This latter, though I may have questioned from time to time its economic value, I have always seen the charm of. Loyalty to family, like patriotism, is perhaps justified so long as it does not become a sort of chauvinism of the gens, but follows instead the line of the golden mean.

In writing of so many of my contemporary kin and ancestors

— one alone of whom has about 500 descendants! — it has not been possible to avoid, altogether, friction with the views and evaluations of some member of the clan. In this, my policy has been, to hew to the line, let the chips fall where they may. This attitude, however, I have tried to temper with a sincere wish to hurt no one.

Most of what I have herein recorded has been written down too spontaneously to include material of later development. To my soldier brothers themselves, no doubt, experiences in the World War seem too recent to urge their telling. It is much the same with other matters that would, it is true, bring the ravelled threads of my story to something like logical sequence and conclusion. But the threads of life are not logical, nor do they end. And I leave it to some future relative, or at least some later recording of my own, to supply the more recent chapters of our family story.

My debt, for the enjoyment of preparing these pages, has been chiefly to relatives: my parents, Aunt Annie Sipe, and many others. And my needs have been served, perhaps even more generously, by many correspondents not related to the family, whom I am sorry I cannot here name individually. I am grateful also to the authors and publishers of many books and periodicals consulted. One at least of these I must not fail to mention: the History of Piatt County, Illinois, by Emma C. Piatt. To all such sources, I wish to express my sincere gratitude.

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CHAPTER I

AN ANVIL CROSSES THE CONTINENT.

My Great-great-grandfather Merritt was a blacksmith. This I have, definitely, from his grandson, my great-uncle, John William Merritt. Thus I know of at least five generations of Merritts whose brows were wet with honest sweat from labors at a village or crossroads forge. William Merritt, my great-grandfather, represented the second of these; Joseph Wilson Merritt, my grandfather, the third; my father, the younger John William, the fourth; and my brothers, John Coleman and Herbert Leon Merritt, the fifth.* (See footnote, over)

The earliest of these village smithies of which I have any vivid record is that of William Merritt who, coming from near Staunton, Augusta County, Virginia, in the 1840's or early '50's, opened up a crossroads shop near the old Liberty Church, Hutton Township, Coles County, Illinois -- about six or seven miles southeast of the present county seat, Charleston. Here, besides running a farm, he repaired his neighbors' tools and shod their horses, in those days fashioning not only the shoes, but the nails as well. Here at least three of William's sons served their apprenticeships: Joe, Sam, and Andy. But the business of shoeing horses in a scattered settlement where, no doubt, many farmers shod their own, and of repairing agricultural implements in a time when farms were equipped with little more than a plow, could scarcely have been adequate for supporting a family of ten vigorous sons and daughters. Like many of his contemporary craftsmen, William Merritt was a farmer also. Great-uncle John has told me that

(Footnote:)

. . . the fifth.*

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*See Addendum A, "The Ancestry of John William Merritt."

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theirs was quite a big farm, and that he himself was too busy putting in and harvesting the crops to do much blacksmithing. He may have done a little during the War, while Joe, Sam, and Andy were in the army, John being too young to enlist.

The War over, no doubt the very anvil that had served at Liberty crossroads and, who knows, even in Virginia, went with father and sons over into Piatt County, Illinois. Here, on Lake Fork, an easy-going little feeder for the Okaw River, Joe became the proprietor. And here at least two of Joe's sons, Johnnie and Elmer, took their turns with the sledge. At Liberty they had been near the "Mahrew," as theycalled the Embarrass River. Here, at Mackville, in Unity Township, a mile northwest of the present Atwood, Johnnie could now and then find a moment's respite from his work in hurried trips to the east bank of Lake Fork, after water for the slake-tub. Here two of Joe Merritt's brothers also worked as blacksmiths: Andy, who had been in the War, and that attractive young devil, "Bein." Andy later moved to Texas. Bein died, while still a young man.

The family anvil's next move was a short one -- only a mile or so southeast from Mackville, to Atwood. A new stretch of railroad had just been built across the southern end of Piatt County, the line I, as a lad, was to know as the C. H. & D. -- the Cincinnati, Hamilton, and Dayton. This new route missed Mackville and the Merritt blacksmith-shop by half a mile. Another town, Atwood, sprang up, a mile beyond. To this

promising village went the Merritts, leasing from the railroad company, for a period of 99 years, a lot on which Joe and his sons, Johnnie and Elmer, were to shoe horses and "sharp" plows for almost half a century. Here the Merritt name remained on the old building even after Johnnie and Elmer had gone into business at Decatur, Illinois, for it was not until "Little John," of the next generation, had turned the business over to an outsider and gone to California that it definitely ceased to be the enterprise of some member or other of the Merritt clan.

The Decatur period I pass over briefly. For me, the family scribe, the business there had not the glamour of a country shop. Johnnie, Elmer, and Johnnie's "Bud," a new recruit, now did nothing but shoe horses -- the brewery's draft-horses, the Fire Department's restless animals, and some of the race-horses whose owners had been the special clientèle of my father's predecessor, rugged old Andy Dunstan.

And now the Merritt anvil makes its last and longest journey westward. In 1913 my father, selling out his business at Decatur, emigrates to California. Little John is already there, having temporarily abandoned the old trade. Elmer and his two sons have followed Andy, long since dead, down into Texas, to become farmers and mechanics, but not blacksmiths at their own forges.

In 1913, or a little later, "Big John" and Bud stand once

more before a forge owned by a Merritt. Johnnie has bought a little shop at the corner of High and East Fourteenth Streets, Oakland, California. Their customers here are a picturesque lot: Portuguese creamery drivers, Italian truck-gardeners, Japanese florists. The Melrose district in which the shop stands is booming just now. Factories go up all around. Soon horses are to be seen only now and then, drawing the ramshackle wagon of the rags-bottles-sacks man or that of a vegetable vendor. But, as Life, in a clever cartoon, has the village loafer declare to another old crony, "I believe the automobile has come to stay!" The family's romantic author now grows fearful of the day when Merritt & Sons will take down from above their door the legend "General Blacksmiths" and replace it with the more prosaic one of "Garage." But it never happens. With highways to build, there still are bolts to be made, picks to be sharpened, other tools to be dressed. Johnnie's business grows at leaps and bounds. He moves across High Street to a larger building. And soon even this old two-story frame structure -- once a suburban house of assignation, as its many small rooms upstairs testify -- grows more and more crowded with trucks, trailers, and contractors' tools. The work keeps busy Johnnie, Bud, and Little John, the latter having once more returned to the profession of his fathers. Sire and sons dream now of a bigger shop, of a modern brick building in which to install adequately their already very fine equipment. The old building, relic of the gay 'Nineties, is wrecked. Up goes the handsome

new one. And now comes the dramatic climax to the whole pageant: a neon sign in colors, flashing to evening crowds on Fourteenth Street the information that Merritts and the sons of Merritts still do the people's blacksmithing at 1244 High Street. Thus ends, on Pacific shores, under the very twinkle of lights on San Francisco's hills, a family's saga that, so far as the present record is able definitely to go, began back in the days when Great-great-grandfather Merritt, after pounding a thousand dollars out of resistent iron and steel, used to go into Richmond, on the Atlantic side of the continent, and "blow it all in" over night.

CHAPTER II

SCOTCH, IRISH, OR BOTH?

"I can run my Ancestry Back to 1700 or there about, living near Norfolk, Virginia. So you See I am full Southren Bred. One of the F. F. V. and not Yankey, as I was called when South." Thus did my paternal grandfather, Joseph Wilson Merritt, write me a few years before his death. His brother, John William Merritt, once made the statement to me, "Merritt is English." This meager bit is the only information I have of the European origin of my sire's clan. English also, no

doubt, was a tributary of the Merritt stream. After a talk, some years ago, with John William Merritt, I made the following note: "Uncle John says one of his brothers ('Bein,' I think) had the middle-name 'Warrick' (so he pronounced it, though I wonder if it was not Warwick), and that he thinks this 'Warrick' was the name of one of his grandmothers." If this is correct, it would have to be the name of his paternal grandmother, for his mother's mother was Ann Sparks, ~~of the latter's ancestry, I know nothing.~~ daughter of David and Sally Tift. She died, a widow, at the home of her son-in-law, William Merritt — whether in Virginia or Illinois, I am not sure.

Great-uncle John Merritt once assured me that his mother's people, the Fitzpatricks, were Irish, not Scotch. This raises a question — and a digression. I am too much the amateur as genealogist and historian to enter very boldly my views in a controversy about the relative importance in America's early population of its Celtic Irish, Scotch-Irish, and Anglo-Saxon elements. I have read the assertion of Shaemas O'Sheel* that it is

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*The American Mercury, Dec., 1932. P. 501.

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erroneous to suppose "that the old American stock included many North Irish but few Celtic Irish. This hoary ipse dixit is antipodal to the facts. They are found in the Irish names on old records . . . and muster-rolls of the Revolutionary Armies. Celtic Irish names predomin to heavily." Mr. O'Sheel denies that

there is any validity "in the distinction between North Irish and Celtic Irish. The native Irish were not exterminated in the Plantations of Ulster. Many remained, submerged but gradually rising; many expropriated drifted back, and were in Ulster in great numbers by the time of the Revolution; many of the settlers were Highland Scots, one in blood and language with the old Irish; all Ulstermen, by 1780, of whatever stock, considered themselves Irish, and were the leaders of Irish nationalist movements."

All this may be quite true. Nevertheless, the "Scotch-Irish myth," so called by some writers, is so really a myth. (To the term "Scotch-Irish" itself, I can see no greater objection than to the similarly convenient ones, Amerindian and Aframerican.) There occurred, particularly during the seventeenth century, a great grafting upon the native Irish in the north, of a vast army of Scotsmen. While it may indeed be true that many of these latter were "Highland Scots, one in blood and language with the old Irish," nevertheless these must have brought with them a north-country heritage in many ways quite dissimilar to the genius of their brother Celts of the south. The ambitious study of Michael J. O'Brien, A Hidden Phase of American History: Ireland's Part in America's Struggle for Liberty,* ~~in spite of its author's~~

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*Dodd, Mead & Co., N. Y., 1920.

~~sometimes excessive zeal for his subject~~, is a book that might well be read as a supplement to the typical course in American History -- if for no other reason, to destroy the impression of the average high-school, and even college, student that our nation's independence was effected by a colonial population as purely Anglo-Saxon as the English tyranny from which it freed itself.* An examination of O'Brien's researches leaves one convinced

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*This observation is not out of place, perhaps, in a homespun genealogy like the present, which is by no means dedicated to the purpose of showing the author's relationship to the New England Cabots, who speak only to the Lowells, who speak only to God!

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that no other element contributed more to the independence of our country than the Celtic blood that coursed, and still courses, through our national body.

However, O'Brien himself states that a "reliable English statistician, Sir William Petty, estimated that in 1659 the population of Ulster was: 'Irish, 63,350; English, Scotch, and other aliens, 40,571; a total of 103,921.'"* Using these figures,

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*P. 338.

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O'Brien says "it would be ridiculous to assume that the forty thousand 'English, Scotch, and other aliens' of Ulster in the

middle of the seventeenth century could have produced such a racial change in the predominant element in that province, within the space of a century, that the entire population became 'Scotch-Irish.'" But would such an assumption be ridiculous? Evidently O'Brien did not completely repudiate the following, from the Colonial Records of North Carolina (Vol. V), else he would not have quoted it in his book: "The immigrants from Ireland . . . sought the wilds of America by two avenues: the one by Delaware River at Philadelphia, the other through Charleston. . . . These two streams from the same original fountain, Ireland, meeting and intermingling in this new soil, preserve their characteristic differences, the one possessing some of the air and manner of Pennsylvania, the other of Charleston."* Now, if it is absurd to suppose that the mingling

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*O'Brien, P. 358.

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of forty thousand Scotch and other aliens with sixty thousand Irish could, in a century, justify the term "Scotch-Irish," then how is one to believe that the immutable Irish could, in these two migrations, extending over but a few generations, have taken on somewhat of the "air and manner" of Pennsylvania and Charleston, respectively? Could even an Oriental race, contacting an Occidental, under like conditions, preserve the racial purity that O'Brien claims for his Irish?

On the other hand, another writer, the Reverend John Walker Dinsmore, in The Scotch-Irish in America*, goes so far as to de-

* The Winona Publishing Co., Chicago, 1906. Pp. 7ff.

clare that, "Whatever blood may be in the veins of the genuine Scotch-Irishman, . . . there is not mingled with it one drop of the blood of the old Irish or Celt. . . . The Scotch-Irishman is a lowland Scotchman who moved over into the north of Ireland." And the Lowland Scotch "were of Teutonic or Anglo-Saxon origin." Still another writer, Henry Pratt Fairchild, in Immigration: A World Movement And Its American Significance*, says that the

* The Macmillan Co., N. Y., 1918. P. 36.

so-called Scotch-Irish are "the most composite of all the people of the British Isles, being a mixture of the primitive Scot and Pict, the primitive Briton and Irish, and a large admixture of Norwegian, Dane, Saxon, and Angle. They were called Scots because they lived originally in Scotia, and Irish because they moved to Ireland." And Fairchild quotes from J. R. Commons's Races and Immigrants in America (p. 32) as follows: "They are very little Scotch and much less Irish."

To return to O'Brien*, "The Scotch (in Ireland) were not more

* P. 339.

immune than the English colonists to the charms of the Irish maidens, for responsible antiquarians have shown that many of the descendants of the Scotch colonists intermarried with the native Irish." On this point, Charles A. Hanna, in whose judgment one has much faith, says, in The Scotch-Irish*: "Inter-

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*G. P. Putnam's Sons, N. Y., 1902. Vol. I, pp. 160-62.

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marriages between the natives (of Ulster) and the Scotch settlers of the seventeenth century, and their descendants in Ulster, have been so rare . . . as to be practically anomalous. . . . It is true, this cannot be said of the English colonists of Elizabeth's time, nor of Cromwell's soldiers. . . . (Yet) These Scottish people in Ireland to-day exhibit all the distinctive racial characteristics of their Scottish forefathers." Hanna supports this by quoting the Reverend John S. Macintosh of Philadelphia, "perhaps better qualified to speak conclusively on the subject than any other living person."

Having thus placed the blame -- for such Scotch-Irish intermingling as did occur -- where blame properly belongs, i.e., with the Irish maidens and Cromwell's soldiers, let us analyze a little the result of this amalgamation. The following is from James Parton's Life of Andrew Jackson*: "Some are Scotch-Irish,

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*Ticknor and Fields, Boston. 1866. Vol. I, p. 35. Used by permission of the D. Appleton-Century Co., N. Y.

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and others are Irish-Scotch. Some come to their Scotch traits only after sowing a plentiful crop of the most Irish wild-oats. Some are canny Scots in repose, and wildly Irish in contention. Some, at times of keen excitement, exhibit, in a surprising manner, an Irish dash and daring, controlled by Scottish wariness. And some will imbibe an opinion or a prejudice with Irish readiness, and then cling to it with Scotch tenacity."

As regards my own humble ancestors, while certain family tradition is careful to record that my great-great-grandmother, Nancy Bland, though born in Ireland, was of Scotch blood, and married John Rennels, of ~~England~~ English descent, it also takes pains to show that the Fitzpatricks were "Irish, not Scotch." Webster, under fitz, has the following to say: "(Old French filz, fiz, son, French fils, Latin filius. . . .) A son; -- used in compound names, to indicate paternity, especially of the illegitimate sons of kings and princes of the blood; as, Fitzroy, the son of the king; Fitzclarence, the son of the Duke of Clarence." And Fitzpatrick? It may be that in some of the Fitzpatricks with whom this record deals there is the taint of illegitimacy. But I doubt if future researches will reveal any royal Patrick in my ancestral line. But whether I am or am not the scion of an illustrious Patrick with royal blood in his veins, I am no doubt descended from some person who, being the son of one Patrick and living in that period when the Norman influence produced such patronymics as Fitzhugh, Fitzroy, and the like, be-

came the first Fitzpatrick of my line. Or perhaps he was named for some illustrious Patrick, without being at all related. S. Baring-Gould, in Family Names And Their Story*, says that the

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John Conley. Without ever having learned definitely that the Conleys were Irish, I have always assumed that this was so. Indeed, they typify for me the true Irish-American. They came out of North Carolina about 1820-30. ~~John Reynels, my earliest known ancestor of that name, born in 1761, came from England. His wife, Nancy Bland, was born in Ireland, in 1767, of Scotch ancestors.~~

There is definite tradition, through my mother, *née* (See footnote, over) Samson, and through others, that the Samsons were English. There was still something of the Englishman in my Grandfather Samson, although he was born in America. To me, he represented the Englishman as we so often find him after residence of a generation or two in a pioneer, more primitive setting than his crowded native isle. It is an interesting point, this remarkably quick development of the less sympathetic Britisher into the more likeable English colonial, once he places his feet on new soil. Canadians, it has always seemed to me, are often the very antithesis of their European cousins. And it was the Australian son of John Bull whom the American doughboy liked best, perhaps, of all his comrades in the late War. It is significant that my mother should call her grandfather, Ephraim Samson, "a typical Englishman" and that I should find in Ephraim's son, James, a typical American. At least, he has always seemed to me a representative Hoosier. And, as Irvin S. Cobb says, "Your

Geo. H. Doran Co., N. Y., 1924. P. 15.
Indiana vol. of the "America Guyed Books" series, ~~P. 15.~~

*From Indiana, by Irvin S. Cobb, copyright, 1924, by Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc. P. 15.

(Footnote:)

. . . Samson*, . . .

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*See Addenda B, "The Ancestry of Lola Mardula (Samson) Merritt."

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Indianian of today, pure Northerner on one side and one hundred per cent Southerner on the other, is the most typical American in the whole democracy." Ephraim Samson married Martha Apperson, daughter of James and Sally (Cook) Apperson. ~~Of the latter's ancestry I have no record.~~ James Apperson Samson, my maternal grandfather, son of Ephraim and Martha, married Elina Jane Robbins, daughter of Nathaniel and Rosa Young Robbins. Of the Robbinsos, I know that they were Kentuckians, and that there flowed through my grandmother's veins a French or Spanish strain. This, apparently, is the only blemish on my otherwise unsullied Celto-Anglo-Saxon background.

CHAPTER III

PARALLEL TRAILS "UP WEST."

The sojourn of the Merritts in Augusta County, Virginia, was the first recorded paralleling of our trail with that of the Lincoln, and many another American, family through Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois. This following of very much the same route had its beginning in Augusta -- at that time still one of the "back counties" -- and adjacent Rockingham County, where, respectively, the Merritts and the Lincolns tarried for a generation or two. It ended in Coles County, Illinois, where my Merritt, Conley, Nemels, and Fitzpatrick forebears were -- apparently without knowing it -- close neighbors

to Tom Lincoln, Abe's father, and, as Tom called her, "the old woman," Sally Bush Lincoln, Abe's stepmother. Between the two termini there must have been occasional approaches, in northern Kentucky and southern Indiana, to the "Linkerns" by some of the Appersons, Robbinses, and Samsons from whom I am descended. Back "in Rockingham," writes William Joseph Showalter*, "is the old farmhouse in which was born the father

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*"Virginia: A Commonwealth That Has Come Back," in The National Geographic Magazine, April, 1929. Pp. 403-80.

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of Abraham Lincoln. . . . Three generations of the Lincoln family lived in the Shenandoah Valley. Many of the relatives of the martyred President still live there."

In The Lincoln Country, by Rexford Newcomb*, states that

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*J. B. Lippincott Co., Philadelphia, 1928. Pp. 16-21.

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John Lincoln, Abe's great-grandfather, "in 1773 removed (from New Jersey and Pennsylvania) to Linville Creek, Rockingham County, Virginia, where he died in 1788." My own grandfather, Joe Merritt, was born about fifty miles from the present Linville, Rockingham County -- at Churchville, near Staunton, in Augusta County, on October 28th, 1873. Newcomb says that Abe's grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, was "born in Berks County, Pennsylvania, May 13, 1744. He removed to Rockingham (then Augusta)

County, Virginia, and in 1770 married Bathsheba Herring. He removed to Kentucky in 1782." Thomas Lincoln, the son of this Abraham and father of the President, was "born on Linville Creek. . . . January 6, 1778." Showalter, again, speaking of the population of the Old Dominion, "Mother of States," says: "West of the Blue Ridge its basic population was Scotch Irish, Swiss, Dutch, and German; east of the mountains, English." And, "coming in through the port of Philadelphia between 1700 and 1775, the first generation of these people settled in eastern Pennsylvania and in the Shenandoah Valley. Many of the second generation of those who stopped in Pennsylvania moved southward when they reached maturity." The Merritts, however, seem to have come west from Norfolk, some time after 1700. If this first movement westward brought them into Augusta before 1782, then they were neighbors of Abe's forebears -- though there may have been little to suggest that out of that contemporary group of Lincolns was to come a future President.

Down into Kentucky, up into Indiana, and across to "the Illinois" went the Lincolns. At about the same time that young Abe was moving up across the Ohio, the Hobbins blood of my veins was having its direction likewise shifted towards southern Indiana, there to mingle with the Samson and the Apperson. And now this mixed current, like the Lincoln, was to cross the Wabash into Illinois. Meanwhile, a stream of red corpuscles emanating from the bodies of Sparrows, Fitzpatricks, Merritts,

and possibly Harwicks, was coursing across mountains and prairies, destined to join the Conley, the Rennels, and, finally, the Sanson currents in central Illinois.

Abe Lincoln's father, Newcomb says, "died in Coles County, Illinois, January 17, 1851." His stepmother was living there at the time of the assassination and, I believe, died there. "It was she," Carl Sandburg* says, "who tried to tell what there was

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*Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years (Blue Ribbon Books, Harcourt, Brace & Co., Inc., N. Y., 1926). Pp. 271-2.

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between her and young Abe in saying, 'His mind and mine, what little I had, seemed to run together.'" Abe himself had helped his parents build their Coles County cabin, had visited them there from time to time. The distance between the Lincoln homestead and Liberty settlement, where a whole host of my relatives lived at this time, cannot have been more than twenty or twenty-five miles. Yet, strangely enough, I had never heard mentioned by any of them this nearness to the family whose name is the very symbol of America, until, questioning one of the Conley descendants, I recently received this answer: "The Lincolns lived in the southwest part of Coles County, and our people in the eastern. I don't suppose that they had any acquaintance with each other. Abe Lincoln used to ride past the Rennelses and Conleys on his rounds as lawyer. The Lincoln Trail is laid out from Charleston to Marshall, in Clark County." The Lincoln

cabin, as Sandburg* states, stood on "Goose Nest Prairie, in the

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*P. 58.

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southern part of Coles County. Eight miles from the new farm was the town of Charleston. Young Lincoln drove there with an ox team and sold loads of cordwood split with his own axe." This cabin, an interesting photograph of which appears in Sandburg's book, had a strange subsequent history. Occupied for years by Lincoln's stepmother, it was later sold, taken apart, and shipped to Chicago, to be re-assembled for the Columbian Exposition. Before the opening, however, this precious relic had mysteriously disappeared. An Associated Press staff writer closes the story, June 24th, 1933, with the following: "Mrs. Eleanor Gridley, 87, who supervised the removal, . . . said (in 1933) she had come to believe that the persons responsible . . . were those ashamed of the humble origin of Abraham Lincoln."

While on the subject of this Coles County home of the Lincolns, let me quote from The Paternity of Abraham Lincoln, by William E. Barton*: "The tombstone of Thomas Lincoln (Abe's

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*Geo. H. Doran Co., N. Y., 1920. Pp. 36, 43, 253, 290. Used by special permission of The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis.

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father) at Farmington, Coles County, Illinois, (reads:) 'Thomas Lincoln, Born January 6, 1778; died January 15, 1851.' . . . When (Abe) Lincoln was on his circuit he repeatedly visited his

father's home, and left money. . . . (Ward Hill Lamon, in his Life of Abraham Lincoln, from His Birth to His Inauguration as President, p. 463) tells of Lincoln's visit to his relatives in February, 1861, after his election to the Presidency: 'Thence they went to the spot where old Tom Lincoln was buried.' . . . Herndon . . . in 1865 . . . visited her (Sarah Bush Lincoln, presumably in Coles County)." Also from Lincoln: The Man, by Edgar Lee Masters*: (Thomas Lincoln) "moved to a farm near

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* Dodd, Mead & Co., N. Y., 1931. P. 10.

Decatur, Illinois, in the fall of 1829; in 1831 he went on to Buck Grove, Coles County, Illinois; from there to Muddy Point in the same county, after about a year at Buck Grove. Then in a few months he traveled on to Goose Nest Prairie in Coles County, where he lived until his death."

The student of American settlement soon discovers, in any comprehensive study of the movements of succeeding generations across the country, that this arc, with its beginning in Pennsylvania, its center in Kentucky, and its terminus in the Wabash region, was one made by countless family groups. Thus, it was a sort of composite graph that the Lincolns followed, from Pennsylvania to Tom's last resting place in Coles County, Illinois -- a "trace" that my own "kinfolk" closely followed, from the Shenandoah Valley to the Liberty and Whetstone Graveyards where so many of them now sleep.

CHAPTER IV

"SHANNADOR" SOJOURN.

The earliest known of my Merritt ancestors, my great-great-grandfather, was a blacksmith, in Virginia. As Great-uncle John once told me, he was a hard worker, but thought nothing of "blowin' in" a thousand dollars on a single trip to Richmond. He had at least one son, William, my great-grandfather.

I have already quoted William's son, Joe: "I can run my Ancestry Back to 1700 or there about, living near Norfolk, Virginia. So you See I am one of the F. F. V." If this is fact and not just legend, it would account for something that I detect in the typical Merritt that lifts him, potentially at least, above the mere pounding of iron, worthy and honorable though that occupation is. I have always felt, in studying the Merritts I have known, and particularly my grandfather, that they must be representative of the thousands of Anglo-Saxons who, stimulated by the urge for adventure and greater freedom, abandoned culture and the more complex modes of civilization and, entering America's backwoods, there lost much of the veneer of earlier environments. Joe Merritt was the village blacksmith in a hamlet of less than one thousand inhabitants. Yet he was a potential Abe Lincoln, reminding me in many ways of that noblest of Americans. It requires no particularly fertile exercise of the imagination to picture

this village blacksmith and Justice of the Peace progressing through the legal and political activities of his community to state and, finally, national honors. The stuff was in him, just as it may have been in some of Abe Lincoln's kin to become great though they never actually got beyond spelling their name "Linkern" -- or with an X.

It is often pointed out that quaint bits of Elizabethan English are still to be discovered, not in Boston, but in the back-o'-beyonds of such states as Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee. Nicholas Cresswell, in his Journal* (1774-1777), says that the

*The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell: 1774-1777 (The Dial Press, N. Y., 1928). P. 271.

Americans "in general speak better English than the English do," and in our own day Lady Astor* assures her English friends that

*See article on "Virginia" in The National Geographic Magazine, April, 1929, by William Joseph Showalter. P. 439.

they are not so genuinely English as her old neighbors in Piedmont Virginia. "We are undiluted," she boasts. And other things than the Queen's English have endured among these backsettlers -- other vestiges of a European heritage. Nor was the life of the earliest of my kinsmen of whom I have much knowledge, the Merritts of the "Shannador" Valley, primitive enough to rob them of that heritage. On the other hand, it enhanced it, giving it new vigor.

But whether we Merritts were ever anything more than skilled

workmen, whether we were, like Lady Astor, or were not, one of the undiluted First Families of Virginia, we did once dwell between the Blue Ridge and the Allegheny Mountains. And if it was not from Tuckahoe proper that Great-great-grandfather journeyed over to Richmond, there to waste a thousand dollars on the fleshpots of a tidewater civilization, it was at least from that side of the Allegheny watershed down which flowed Bullpasture, Cowpasture, and Calfpasture "cricks." For there, only a few miles from these streams, at Churchville, near Staunton, the county seat of the present Augusta County, Virginia, did his son William maintain his family and his business as the village blacksmith. But there must be some foundation for the statement of William's Joe that there were Merritts living in Norfolk in "1700 or there about." This same Joe once told me, too, that some earlier Merritt had been an owner of slaves. May it not, then, have been some subtle ancestral urge, no less than the fleshpots, that enticed William's young "pappy" back towards the site of the family's earlier hearth?

I do not know how far back it was "in the days of the pod-auger" that the Merritts came from the Norfolk region to the Shenandoah Valley. Nor am I sure that it was during their residence in Augusta County that they first united with the Fitzpatricks. That they had, however, many Irish neighbors there, I am told by the Diaries of Rev. Leonhard Schnell and

Rev. Robert Husse, quoted in O'Brien's A Hidden Phase of American History*: "October 13, 1753, we passed a little Town

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*Pp. 336-7.

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called Carl Isles (Carlisle, Pennsylvania), consisting of about sixty houses and inhabited mostly by Irishmen. On October 16, about four o'clock, we continued on our journey. On the way we bought ten bushels of oats from an Irishman, and after we travelled three miles farther we breakfasted at a little creek where Irish people have settled. . . . October 24, 1753, three miles farther we came to Augusta Court House, a little town of about twenty houses surrounded by mountains on all sides. This whole district is settled by Irish and English people. . . . (Lexington, Virginia, a few miles south,) is settled mostly by English and Irish people."

William Merritt must have been a rather handsome fellow. Most of the Merritts I have known were of a brunet type, but William seems to have been fairer, with eyes so blue that, in a portrait, they had the luminosity of dark ones. This portrait, after William's death, hung in the home of his daughter-in-law, my grandmother. To the latter, working alone about the quiet house, while the menfolk were at the shop or in the fields, those eyes sometimes became so disconcerting that Grandmother would say, "Oh, Grandpa Merritt, I wish you'd quit lookin' at me!" But perhaps it was those same eyes that had attracted the

woman who became the mother of William Merritt's children -- Rachel Ann Fitzpatrick. My father tells me that most of the Fitzpatricks he knew were fair. Rachel Ann was the daughter of Ann Sparks and Samuel Fitzpatrick. Of Ann Sparks, I have very little indeed to record. I know that she "lived and died" at William Merritt's house, that she remained a widow after the death of her husband.

Of the Fitzpatricks in general, if not specifically of this Samuel, I know more. There is a family phrase that is sometimes used with reference to any wildness that crops out in us Merritts: "That's the Fitz in him!" (In reality, no doubt, it is often the Merritt in him.) I have Great-uncle John's statement that the Fitzpatricks were Irish, not Scotch. Some of the Fitzpatricks who, if not directly, at least collaterally, followed Samuel were indeed wild. One of them even committed murder, though under circumstances of a kind to explain somewhat, if not actually justify, the deed. But wild though these relatives may have been, they were a picturesque band, and not, surely, so expensive to state and nation as the criminal "Jukes" clan, for example. The latter, it has been said, cost society, in less than a century, over a million dollars. Lest this reference to the "Jukes" tribe -- to which, so far as I know, we are in no way related! -- cast an unmerited shadow over my Fitzpatrick cousins, let us, like Clarence Darrow, distinguished champion of the despised, study the Jukes record with caution, remembering that definition of statistics as "the

fine art of lying with figures." As a matter of fact, there is not so great a difference as we may suppose between such a family and one that turns out governors, mayors, and sheriffs. The complete records of any two such groups would show this. And so the "badness" of the Jukes clan -- and of the Fitzpatricks -- is to be taken with a grain of salt.

I have long felt that the importance claimed for heredity is apt to be exaggerated. What we do inherit, or rather contract, in our earliest and most formative years, is the psychology of our sires. This, truly enough, may make criminals or saints of us all. For the psychic body of one generation does, indeed, linger into the next and later generations. This I have often observed in our own family, in which each generation has its own "Aunt Boogie," its "Uncle Jimmy," and its "Grandpa Samson." This psychic "reincarnation" seems at times almost uncanny, unless one bears in mind how perfectly natural it is. Innumerable times have I been told that I am a perfect reproduction of my Grandfather Samson. This is not at all strange, for, although he died when I was a child of eight or nine, his spirit had made by that time a tremendous impression. Moreover, his life and philosophy having ever been the model for his daughter, this model would inevitably have reached me, her son, even though I had never known and loved him. In this sort of "heredity" I do, certainly, believe. The eminent Viennese psycho-analyst,

Doctor Wilhelm Stekel, in his The Beloved Ego* (Das Liebe Ich),

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*Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., London, 1921. P. 62.

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quotes the German psychologist, Marcinowski, as follows: "We carry in us the life of our forefathers, or, more correctly speaking, themselves, as a heritage. In the end we are nothing other than the direct continuation of their life."

Rachel Ann Fitzpatrick was, evidently, like her husband, William Merritt, a native of Virginia. They had thirteen children. Of these, three died before reaching maturity. Of the others, nine all but the two youngest were born in Virginia. The Augusta County family, then, consisted of the following: William Merritt, blacksmith; his wife, Rachel Ann; Rachel's widowed mother, Ann (Sparks) Fitzpatrick; and the children of William and Rachel, born in somewhat this order: Joe (Joseph Wilson), Sam, Andy, "Frank" (Frances), John (William), Rebecca Jane, and "Bein" (Otterbein), and Eugenia. The two youngest, "Matt" (Martha Ann) and "Check" (Silas Winchester), were not added to this already stormy household until it had moved to the prairies of central Illinois. Of the boys, all but John worked at the blacksmith trade at some period or other of their lives. It was at Churchville, near Staunton, that Joe and John, certainly, and the others, five, probably, were born. Churchville was seven or eight miles from Staunton. From Mr. A. M. Drury, of the Bonebrake

Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio, I have learned something of the Merritts' neighbors at Churchville. Mr. Drury writes: "My great-great-grandfather, Ludwig Schmidt (Lewis Smith) went to that locality at the close of the Revolutionary War. He gave the land for the Lutheran Church, and for the Cemetery in which he and his son, Jacob, are buried. His descendants generally became (like the Merritts) United Brethren. . . . The Smiths at Churchville were closely associated with the Lamberts, Boehms, and Shueys living there." No doubt William Merritt served some of these families as horseshoer and general blacksmith. A century later, his great-grandson was to discover descendants of the Shueys living in the very neighborhood in Illinois to which the Merritts and Fitzpatricks had meanwhile also gone.

Of the life at Churchville, Joe Merritt, eighty years later, was to write as follows: "I was Born Oct 23 — 1838 in Augusta County, Va., between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Alleganies Mountains, what is Known as the Shannador Valley. Staunton, Va., being the head of the Valley, which run North West from Staunton, widening out like a fan. A very fertile valley." (It is interesting to note that Grandfather's spelling, "Shannador," is not so far from that to be found on some of the old maps of the region. For example, the Trader's Map of 1750-53, reproduced, from the original manuscript in the Library of Congress, by Charles A. Hanna, in The Wilderness Trail*, whereon the form "Shanadore" is given.)

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*G. P. Putnam's Sons, N. Y., 1911. Vol. II, p. 156.

"I lived," GrandFather Merritt continues, "at the foot hills on the west Side of the Valley. A few miles from our home we could gather all the Huckleberries in abundance 2 varities Blue & Black. Also Chesnuts and Chipkapins, Mountain tea berries. We could stand in our yard, look east, turn and look West and if a clear day the (mountains) appeared only a Short distance away. On the east Side of the Blue Ridge Mountains was called Tucky Ho or old Va. . . . I never Saw neither of my Grand Fathers. But both of my grand Mothers. My Grand Mother on my Mother's Side lived & died at my Father's House."

Joe was the eldest of the children. Though he must have spent much time as a lad in his father's shop, he must also have found, or perhaps stolen, a few free hours now and then to go swimming, berrying, or hunting with his brothers and other small boys of the neighborhood. He was a good swimmer and on two occasions his skill in the water proved a valuable asset: as a young man, he effected his escape from imprisonment in the South by swimming the Peedee River; and, when past seventy, he rescued a young stepson from drowning. It must have been in one of the forks of the Shenandoah that he learned to swim. Calfpasture Creek, too, was not far away, but Churchville stood on its own little stream and this, a branch of the South Fork of the Shenandoah, would be the one to which the Merritt boys would most frequently go. The Allegheny foothills

were, perhaps, a region to which Joe and his brothers went, if at all, only now and then, with their elders, the latter "loaded for bear." The relationship between sire and sons was, I suppose, very much the same in that generation as in my own — one of an almost complete mutual indifference in small matters but of a dutiful loyalty and affection in larger ones. Joe went to his menfolk to work, or for such special privileges as accompanying a deer hunt; to the womenfolk, for life's tenderer amenities. I fancy that Grandma Fitzpatrick had an important rôle in supplying the latter — perhaps even more than did the busy mother, who, with a husband and seven children to look after, could have found little leisure for sentiment. Masculine indifference to the male must have been the keynote to the relationship between Joe and his brothers, also. No doubt he and Sam and Andy formed one natural group, while the younger John and Bein went to their sisters, Rebecca and "Frank," for companionship.

The mother of these lads and lassies was, it appears, somewhat above the reputed wildness of her paternal relatives. My own mother, who remembers her well, has told me what a splendid woman she was, in her old age, and my father bears out this praise. She seems to have been very religious, and we find one of her sons, "Bein," being named for Philip William Otterbein, German founder of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. So that the worst that any moralist can charge her with is that

she may have, very innocently, served as a "carrier" for the "Fitz" that did appear in some of her progeny, though not to the extent of sending any of them to the gallows. The Fitzpatrick who did once approach to the very shadow of it, seems to have been her cousin, or perhaps a nephew. My father remembers this murder well. Of the offender, he says: "Oh, he was no worse than the rest of us. We was all the same breed of pups. The fellow he killed had been kind of tormentin' him, I guess. Trespassin' across his property. He warned him that he'd shoot him if he didn't stop it. And he did. But they never sent him up for it." No more of the "Fitz" dwelt in this less fortunate cousin, perhaps, than in Rachel Ann herself, from whom, along with a certain recklessness of spirit, there also descended to Joe, Sam, and others, much that was admirable.

Her husband, William Merritt, was also a religious person, in his later years at least. This is all the more worthy of record in view of the fact that there is, among the Merritts in general, an almost complete indifference to theology. Most of those I have known, from my grandfather down, have shown a native intelligence that guided them safely through the religious frenzies that were so important an element in the life of earlier days. But Great-grandfather seems to have been a quite ardent and orthodox Christian, a disciple, apparently, of Otterbein. And if he did succeed in following the gentle credo of the Nazarene, he deserves all the greater credit for having done

so with the handicap of "an awful temper." The Fitzpatrick reputation for wildness is no more firmly fixed than is the tradition of uncontrolled temper in the Merritts. It has been declared of more than one recent or contemporary person of the name that he had "a temper like a sawmill." My grandfather, my father, and I, myself, have often been accused of a failure to properly master it. But this Merritt temper, as a matter of fact, cannot have been so very inconsistent in a religious man of William Merritt's day, when practically every Christian religion gave full play to a wrath-of-God quality present in each of them.

This hot-headedness was no stronger in William than in his grandson, my father. For more than ~~fifty~~ sixty years my mother — and he himself — have striven to master it. And they have accomplished much, certainly, for Johnnie no longer breaks up the furniture as in the old days. In view of this, I will relate but one of his early sins. My mother had just finished papering the kitchen walls, by her own labor. John came home to dinner. There was sauerkraut that day, fried in bacon fat. John, as usual, was in a hurry to get back to his work. He filled his plate and speared a steaming forkful. It burned his mouth. Picking up the tureen, he hurled it against the new wallpaper, and hastened back to the job of feeding a growing family. This task, Johnnie never neglected. Though his temper may have kept his gentle partner "on tenterhooks" throughout

the years, it was a part, perhaps, of the incessant drive he felt of "bringing in the bacon."

I am told that much of the scant education of William and Rachel Ann's children came from the coaching that the latter somehow found time to give them. Attendance at school was probably quite irregular. Joe's letters and his Docket Book, kept while he was Justice of the Peace in Piatt County, Illinois, reveal a sad neglect of orthography -- as whose letters, indeed, did not in those days? Less correct than Abe Lincoln's, they were little worse than Andrew Jackson's and considerably better than those of Old Hickory's wife, Rachel. Joe Merritt's "schoolin'" must have been not unlike that of Abraham Lincoln. I think Joe had very much the same feeling about the printed page. He longed to be the master of it. I have no idea how little or how much he may have read as a boy, but I do know that those physically large ears of his were symbols of a corresponding eagerness to know. His younger brother, John, once said to the author of this record, "As soon as I was big enough to read, I begun to want to go west. We bought a book called 'Beyond The Mississippi,' from a book-agent, and I read that book a dozen times." If Joe read it fewer times, it was because he absorbed it at the first or second reading.*

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* If this was the Beyond The Mississippi of Albert D. Richardson (American Pubg. Co., Hartford, Conn., 1867), it must have been the favorite, not of Joe Merritt, but of his younger brothers. It doubtless had much to do with his brother John's striking out, in the 'Seventies, for "Californey."

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CHAPTER V

CONESTOGA CAVALCADE.

What romance there must have been for the Merritt lads in the blue mist of that great mountain wall lying west of their familiar Shenandoah Valley! For Joe and his brethren, there was no veiled mystery in mountains themselves: they had never been out of sight of them. The mystery lay beyond them. Of old "Tucky Ho," east of the Blue Ridge, and of its tidewater culture, they would already know somewhat, through their father and grandfather. But what lay westward, t'other side of the Alleghenies? We can imagine the menfolk gathered about the family hearth, drinking vigorously but temperately of homemade peach-brandy, and speculating from time to time upon the wisdom of another move "up West," while Mother and Grandma Fitzpatrick sigh and "swan to goodness!" that these restless sons and husbands will never leave off moving until they have reached the Pacific! For Grandmother and most of the women of her day were indeed rich in the wisdom of experience and travail. They knew exactly what it meant to pull stakes and battle with still another resistant frontier.

But move they must. What strange, ineluctable fact was it, back of this eternal pointing of wagon-tongues westward? Why did men never reverse their direction, why never retrace old paths

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eastward? Robert M. Coates, in The Outlaw Years*, says: "A

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*The Literary Guild of America, N. Y., 1930. P. 10. Used by permission of the author and The Macaulay Co., New York City.

Dr. Raphael Dubois of the University of Lyons, constructed an ingenious device to prove that man, like the squirrel in a cage, is irresistibly impelled to step westward by the fact of the earth's rotation eastward. Others were content to mention, diffidently, 'mystic forces' and 'far-seeing powers.'" I think a sounder explanation would be, that men like the Fitzpatricks and the Merritts possessed the horse-sense embodied in the old saying that, when you can hear your neighbor's shotgun, it's time to move* — the gun's report coming, in this case, out of

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*Sandburg's Abraham Lincoln. P. 73.

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the more settled, sea-bound East. (Against overcrowding, the Indians had another signal. Hanna's The Wilderness Trail* quotes

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*Vol. II, pp. 223-4.

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from the Lyman C. Draper manuscript Life of Daniel Boone as follows: ""There were then—1769-70—no bees in Kentucky, . . . for bees generally keep pace with, and not much precede the advancing settlements. Hence originated the name of English flies bestowed upon them by the Indians, who used to say to each other, when they saw a swarm of bees in the woods, 'Well, brothers, it

is time for us to decamp, for the white people are coming.'")

Moving westward not only put you out of range of your neighbor's bees and buckshot, but it also placed you among a people less inclined to wish you harm from these. This fact had been noted by Elias Pym Fordham*, who, travelling through "the Illinois"

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*Personal Narrative of Travels in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky; and of a Residence in the Illinois Territory: 1817-1818, Edited by Frederic Austin Ogg, A.M. (The Arthur H. Clark Co., Cleveland, 1906). P. 62.

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in 1817-18, had quoted General Wilkinson: "The further West, the more honest, the more generous the people are. The hunter of the Prairie, of St. Louis, or the woods of Illinois or Tennessee, will divide his venison with you; he will rather strip his shirt off his back than take a cent from you." These were virtues that the Merritt men were looking for, since they were virtues that they themselves might boast. This willingness to share with one's neighbor, as my earlier kinsmen knew, was a thing always present in a pioneer, uncrowded country. That it lingered in Illinois and other such regions beyond the period of which Fordham here speaks, we have many such evidences as the following*: "He (Lincoln)

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*From Lincoln in Illinois, by Octavia Roberts (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1918). Pp. 21-2.

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overtook a stranger on a much-jaded horse about fourteen miles from

noted by Elias Pym Fordham,* who, travelling through "the Illinois"

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*Reprinted by permission of the publishers, The Arthur H. Clark Company, from Fordham (Elias P.) Personal Narrative of Travels in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky; and of a Residence in the Illinois Territory: 1817-1818, Edited by Frederic Austin Ogg. P. 62.

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in 1817-18, had quoted . . .

Springfield. . . . Lincoln learned that the stranger was hastening to the Land Office in Springfield to enter his land before a false friend, who was close behind, could put in a prior claim. In a moment Lincoln was off his horse and had exchanged with the chance acquaintance, who, with a fresh mount, rode off joyfully, to succeed in his errand. This oft-quoted story must in justice be said to illustrate the general good-will between men in sparsely settled regions quite as much as it does the kindly, quick sympathy that beat under a certain homespun shirt."

But perhaps there was no consciously logical reason for this eternal shifting of Americans with the sun. As John Bidwell wrote in his journal*, "when a man moved west, as soon as he was fairly

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*Quoted on p. 39 of Blanche C. Grant's When Old Trails Were New: The Story of Taos (The Press of the Pioneers, Inc., N. Y., 1934). By permission of Wilson-Erickson, Inc., Elmira, N. Y.

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settled, he wanted to move again," still further west. Another old-timer moved into the West "because the darn thing wasn't fenced in and nobody dared keep him off."*

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*Ibid. P. 39.

It has been* said that the chickens of those roving decades

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*Sandburg's Abraham Lincoln. P. 55.

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were so accustomed to being stretched on their backs and having

their feet tied for another trip westward, that they periodically prostrated themselves and extended their legs in mid-air, awaiting the housewife's strip of calico. And the Merritt and Fitzpatrick chickens, I think, were as well trained in this as the Boones' or Lincolns'. When I once read this bit of old humor to my father, he promptly stated that it was one often heard in his youth. So that it is not altogether unlikely that Great-grandmother Fitzpatrick employed the same comic touch to discourage the adventurous males of her household from another jaunt towards the setting sun.

Churchville, Virginia, in the 1850's, no doubt saw its full quota of movers west. Many of these, perhaps, would be singing "Elanoy," in some such version as that recorded by Carl Sandburg*:

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*In "Songs of the Old Frontiers," in The Country Gentleman of April, 1927.

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ELANOY

Way down upon the Wabash,
 Sich land was never known.
If Adam had passed over it,
 The soil he'd surely own.
He'd think it was the garden
 He played in when a boy,
And straight pronounce it Eden
 In the State of El-a-noy.

Chorus:

Then move your family westward,
 Bring all your girls and boys.
And cross at Shawnee Ferry
 To the State of El-a-noys.

'Twas here the Queen of Sheba came
 With Solomon of old,
An ass load of spices,
 Pomegranates and fine gold.
And when she saw this lovely land
 Her heart was filled with joy;
Straightway she said, "I'd like to be
 A queen in El-a-noy."

She's bounded by the Wabash,
 The Ohio and the Lakes.
She's crawfish in the swampy lands,
 The milk sick and the shakes;
But these are slight diversions
 And take not from the joy
Of living in this garden land,
 The State of El-a-noy.

Chorus:

Then move your family westward,
 Good health you will enjoy,
And rise to wealth and honor,
 In the State of El-a-noy.

Andy Merritt would add this to his fiddle répertoire, along with "Turkey in the Straw," "Leather Britches," and possibly the following, which his grand-nephew recently picked up from an old Hoosier friend, James Colquhoun:

"Oh, my wife, my loved wife, my wife I took to be,
 Whose hat is that ahangin' where my hat ought to be?"

"Oh, you old fool, you blind fool, can't you never see,
 That's nothin' but a milk-crock that Mammy sent to me!"

"Oh, I've travelled many thousand miles -- ten thousand
 miles and more --
 But I never saw a milk-crock with silk lining in before!"

"Oh, my wife, my loved wife, my wife I took to be,
 Whose coat is that ahangin' where my coat ought to be?"

"Oh, you old fool, you blind fool, can't you never see,
 That's nothin' but a night-gown that Mammy sent to me!"

"Oh, I've travelled many thousand miles -- ten thousand
 miles and more --
 But I never saw a night-gown with pockets in before!"

I doubt if Great-grandfather William Merritt, having decided to move to "Elanoy," had much to dispose of in the way of worldly goods before starting west. I doubt if earlier Merritts had, even those who, as my grandfather once assured me, owned slaves — which, in those days, was not always an indication of affluence. But moving, for the Merritts and Fitzpatricks, must have meant a little more than "putting out the fire and calling the dog."* At

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*Archer Butler Hulbert's Frontiers: The Genius of American Nationality (Little, Brown, & Co., Boston, 1929). P. 155.

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any rate, I quote the following as typical of this aspect of the shifting of America's population Pacificward — an old sale bill*

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*From "The Knave," in the Oakland (Calif.) Tribune of June 24, 1934.

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in which J. L. Moss, ready to leave Kentucky, announces: "Having sold my farm and leaving for 'Oregon Territory' by ox team, I will offer on March 1, 1849, all of my personal property, to-wit: All ox teams, except two teams, Buck and Ben and Tom and Jerry; two milch cows, one grey mare and colt, one pair of oxen and yoke, one baby yoke, two ox carts, one iron plow with wood mole board, 800 feet of poplar weather boards, 1000 three-foot clapboards, 150 ten-foot fence rails, one 60-gallon soap kettle, 85 sugar troughs made of white ash timber, ten gallons of maple syrup, two spinning wheels, 30 pounds of mutton tallow, 20 pounds of beef

tallow, one large loom made by Jerry Wilson, 300 poles, 100 split hoops, 100 empty barrels, one 32-gallon barrel of Johnson Miller whisky 7 years old, 20 gallons of apple brandy, one 40-gallon still, four sides of oak tanned leather, one dozen reel hooks, two handle hooks, one dozen wooden pitch forks, three scythes and cradles, one-half interest in a tan yard, one 32-calibre rifle, bullet molds and powder horn, rifle made by Ben Miller, 50 gallons of soft soap, hams, bacon and lard, 40 gallons of sorghum molasses, six heads of fox hounds, all soft mouth except one. At the same time I will sell my six Negro slaves -- two men, 35 and 50 years old; two boys, 12 and 18 years old; two Mulatto wenches, 40 and 35 years old. Will sell all together to same party, as will not separate them. Terms of sale, cash in hand of note to draw 4 per cent interest with Bob McCannel as security. My home is two miles south of Versailles, Kentucky, on McConn's Ferry Pike. Sale will begin at 8 o'clock a.m. Plenty to drink and eat."

The longing in the Merritt men for more shotgun room, the curiosity in their children about a world beyond Calfpasture Creek, must have been whetted by conversation around the Merritt forge. For much of the work there consisted, I suppose, of repairs to "prairie schooners" travelling west. Long before my relatives left the Shenandoah Valley, a great cavalcade of heavily built wagons had begun to move out of the Pennsylvania valley from which these sturdy vehicles got their name. The valley, in turn, had derived its name from the tribe of Indians who dwelt there -- the

Conestogas. These wagons had their lower portion painted a brilliant blue, the upper a bright scarlet. Above was a frame over which was stretched a covering of Osnaburg sheeting or some such material, completing the picture so familiar to us moderns in old prints of the "prairie schooner." The wagon-bed curved upward at each end, thus preventing loss of "plunder" along the rough way. Usually there was, at some convenient place, a tool-box, often with heavy, homemade lock. Thousands of wagons of this or similar design crossed our land before the advent of the canal, the steamboat, and the railroad. And they were to go on rumbling across the country for several decades after that of which we are now speaking. A long-continued pageant as genuinely American as Plymouth Rock and Faneuil Hall!

John M. Stahl's Growing With The West* has the following to

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*Longmans, Green & Co., N. Y., 1930. Pp. 61-2.

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say about the wagons of this period: "Every blacksmith proclaimed by his sign that he was a wagon-maker. If the neighbor had a Conestoga wagon it was certain that he or his ancestor had come from Pennsylvania, New York, or some other eastern locality. . . . The Conestoga was by odds the heaviest of all the wagons. Next in weight and staunchness was the wagon from New England. As the wagon was of less and less weight it bespoke an origin farther and farther south. The lightest wagons of all came from South Carolina. One of our diversions (in the Stahls' pioneer home in

western Illinois) was to guess at night whose wagon we heard on the road. The wagons from Pennsylvania, New England, Kentucky and Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee, and South Carolina, had each a different sound; and different wagons from the same State had different sounds, depending, in each case, on its condition of chronic disrepair. A man's character could be known by his wagon almost as accurately as by his dog." Undoubtedly the Merritt wagon bespoke its makers' wiry strength.

There is a description, not of a typical but, rather, an exceptional prairie schooner in The Early Pioneers of Illinois,*

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*The Early Pioneers and Pioneer Events of the State of Illinois (Eastman Bros., Chicago, Ill., 1899). P. 19. Courtesy of The Fulton Democrat, Lewiston, Ill., and the family of the late Chas. K. Offield.

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reminiscences of early Fulton County, Illinois, by Harvey Lee Ross: "I remember very well when Col. Simms and Major Walker passed through Havana with their caravan from Virginia. They stayed with my father over night, and the next morning we ferried them over the Illinois river. They had the most splendid traveling outfit I had ever seen. Their horses were large and fine. They had several carriages and wagons, and one tremendous four-horse 'prairie schooner.' The wagon was about twenty feet long and eight feet high, and all heavily ironed off in old Virginia style. The ferryman said that it was the biggest wagon that had ever crossed the river."

Another writer says: "The 'covered wagon' was a familiar

From Here To Yender: Early Trails and Highway Life, by Marion Nicholl Rawson, (E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., N. Y., 1932). PP. 53-4. Permission of E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., N. Y., publishers & copyright owne

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sight long before the '49ers' made it immortal, for Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, Massachusetts and other sections had made their own individual covered 'waggons' a long time back. We are familiar with the pictures of these long, lumbering arks, the covers drawn or flapping over great hoops, and doleful women and children peeking through the opening at the tail of the cart which rose sharply to hold its occupants from tumbling out and preserve the 'housen stuff' until the last prairie had been crossed and the last river forded. The blue-bodied wagon of Pennsylvania, the black-bodied wagon of New Jersey, the Cape Cod covered wagon, the Conestoga Wagon of sturdy German Lancaster County, and the 'ark' of other localities seem not to have been very different, with their tow-made covers, their rattling hoops and their four dependable wheels."

Augusta County, Virginia, was not many days' journey from the region from which that sturdy symbol of early American restlessness, the Conestoga wagon, derived its name. Writing of the Susquehanna Indians, Charles A. Hanna, in The Wilderness Trail,

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Vol. I, pp. 35 and 46.

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says: "Some years after their final subjection (by the Five

Nations), the old men, women, children, and the few surviving warriors, removed from their old strongholds upon both banks of the Susquehanna River, to a new village which they built on the east side two or three miles inland. Here they lived after William Penn's arrival in Pennsylvania, a broken and dismembered remnant, under the name of Conestogas -- that name being a slight variation of their own tribal name Kanostoge ('at the place of the immersed pole'), and of its French form, Gentastogues or Andastogues." Hanna adds the footnote, "Shea gives the meaning of Andasto, as 'cabin roof pole'; . . . Bruyas defines the Mohawk word, Gannasta as 'cabin poles.'" The historic Conestoga wagon was well-named, not only because it was a product of the Conestoga country but also because its ribbed cover resembled the pole framework of Conestoga-Indian architecture. Hanna reproduces, from Montanus's Nieuwe Weereld (1671), an Amsterdam view of "Sasquesahanok" Fort, which looks like a cluster of prairie schooners, without wheels and oxen.

I doubt if the Merritts left Virginia in anything very gay. If, at their Churchville forge, they built or repaired for some neighbor a finer "equipage" than that in which they themselves were about to leave for Illinois, they would doubtless express their indifference to the fact in the homely saw of early Virginia, "That's a huckleberry above my persimmon," and go on about their business. What I have seen of three generations of the Merritts' handiwork convinces me that it was always utilitarian,

seldom deliberately artistic. One can be sure that any vehicle made at their forge was sturdily built, but with scant attention to any aesthetic theory or rule. My own father builds for the ages — "for posterity and the immortal gods." I have not a doubt that there may be, still in use in Norfolk, some tool or mechanical detail fashioned by a Merritt of the year 1700, still fulfilling its destiny and good for another century or two.

Aside from this certainty that the Merritts' equipment for the trip to Illinois was strongly built, and by the family's own blacksmiths, surely, I know very little about the long journey. Great-uncle John Merritt once told me that he remembered nothing of the trip, but that he did recollect having an elder point out to him, in the new home at Liberty, Illinois, a certain old mare that had helped to bring them west. John may not have been old enough to ride Shanks' Mare, as did Joe and Sam, a good part of the way. But afoot or horseback, walking or riding, the Merritts now "fall in," to join the great American cavalcade.

CHAPTER VI

BUFFALO — INDIAN — PIONEER.

If the reader would learn how completely the winds of Time have erased the footprints of his ancestors across the continent, let him try to retrace the ancestral trek when that has not, by some good fortune, been set down in diary or letter. So far as I know, there is not a single scrap of any such record of the various migrations of our family. Like thousands of other restless Americans, my many relatives shared with their neighbors the great adventure of "going West" without troubling to record that adventure in a single scratch of the pen. In this present ink-flooded age, such inarticulateness seems almost incredible. But it is very natural: in a day when everybody was making long journeys across the land, there would be many who would feel no strong impulse to set down on paper so universal an experience. Had either of my grandparents been at all literary, what treasures he might have left his spiritual heirs!

By what routes, with what equipments, with how much of pleasure and of pain, did my family make its various progresses across the country? In attempting to answer these questions, the best that one can do is to study the general shifting of America's pioneer sons and daughters across the Atlantic-to-the-Mississippi region. One of the most interesting aspects of this subject is

the evolution of the routes by which they came. In this connection, a helpful and enjoyable source is the Series "Historic Highways of America," by Archer Butler Hulbert.* Volume I of the Series, Paths

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* Arthur H. Clark Co., Cleveland, 1902-5.

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of the Mound-Building Indians and Great Game Animals, develops the interesting point that the lines followed by the earliest pioneers and, indeed, those traced across the continent by many of our major automobile highways and railroads, were determined, centuries ago, by the instinct of the "stupid" buffalo and the nature-craft of the Indian in following the direction of least resistance over valleys and mountains. Hulbert* says: "The first explorers

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* Vol. I, p. 21.

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came into the West through gaps where were found broad buffalo roads; . . . the buffalo marked out the most practical portage paths between the heads of our rivers — paths that are closely followed today, for instance, by the Wabash railway between the Maumee and Wabash rivers." And, quoting from the Filson Club's First Explorations of Kentucky,* "buffalo roads determined in many

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* Hulbert, Vol. I, pp. 119-20.

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portions of the State (of Kentucky) not only the lines of travel and transportation, but also of settlement, as particularly shown

America," by Archer Butler Hulbert.* Volume I of the Series, Paths

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*Reprinted by permission of the publishers, The Arthur H. Clark Company, from Hulbert (Archer B.) Historic Highways of America,

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of the Mound-Building Indians and Great Game Animals, . . .

between Maysville and Frankfort, a distance of about eighty miles, where the settlements were first made along the Buffalo road, and later the turnpike and railroad followed in close proximity to the route surveyed by this sagacious animal, which Mr. (Thomas) Benton said blazed the way for the railroad to the Pacific. The same idea is embodied in the vernacular of the unlettered Kentuckian who said that the then great roadmakers were 'the buffler, the Ingin, and the Ingineer.'"

Another book of old days and ways, Blanche C. Grant's Story of Taos*, says: "In making his thin paths, the Indian

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* P. 44.

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shrewdly followed the buffalo, that 'new kind of ox, wild and fierce,' of Coronado's day and recognized later as 'the best civil engineer in the world,' for he unerringly found the lowest course over the mountains. After him came the smaller game, then the stealthy red hunter and finally the white man, profiting by all."

Hulbert*, again, states that "the three great overland

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* Vol. I, pp. 133-9.

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routes were undoubtedly first opened by the buffalo: (the first, that) followed afterward by the Erie canal and the New York Central railway; the second, from the Potomac through southwestern Pennsylvania; the third, the famous route through Cumberland

Gap into Kentucky. It is certain that the two latter routes were great buffalo migration routes and there is little doubt that the route through New York was a buffalo thoroughfare. . . . That sagacious animal undoubtedly 'blazed' -- with his hoofs, on the surface of the earth -- the course of many of our roads, canals, and railways. It is nothing less than wonderful that the old highway selected by the instinct of the bison should be found in two instances, in a space of twenty miles, immediately above the railway tunnel."

The quaint old volume, Illinois As It Is (1857), by Fred Gerhard,* states that the last buffalo was seen east of the

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* Keen & Lee, Chicago, 1857. P. 249.

Mississippi in 1832. Thus we see that this capable trail-builder had been exterminated on that side of the river by the time my Conley and Rennels kin had reached its tributary, "twice removed," the Embarrass River -- about ~~1826 and 1829, respectively.~~ 1832. One of the boy Johnnie Merritt's neighbors and contemporaries, Mr. H. D. Prose, writing of his family's emigration in the 'Seventies from Douglas County, Illinois, to Pawnee County, Kansas, makes interesting mention of other phases of the buffalo's passing than that of the trails he left: "With an ox-team one could gather a load of buffalo bones and take them to the railroad in less than a week's time. He would receive from $6.50 to $7.00 per ton, depending on how clean they were. Nearly all of us camped out, doing our little cooking over a buffalo-chip fire. My brothers

and I soon found what nature fakers called 'mystic circles,' where buffalo had been killed. This fertilizer making the soil richer, the grass grew longer here, forming these circles. In nearly every such place we would find the arrow or bullet that had killed another monarch of the plains. I still have many of these. We found, also, many fine horns. We used thousands of these for fuel.*"

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* Tuscola (Ill.) Journal, Feb. 7, 1935, following.

In Indian Thoroughfares, Hulbert* says: "To a larger degree

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* Vol. II, pp. 13-17.

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than has ever been realized, the explorers, conquerors, and settlers of any portion of this country were indebted to the narrow trail of the Indian," as well as that wider one left by Brother Buffalo. "To what degree the routes of the buffalo became the routes of the Indian it will be difficult to determine. After white men came among the Indians of the Central West they found them using the great, broad roads which the buffalo made to and from the salt licks and feeding-grounds. The earliest travelers in the West found Indian trails and buffalo traces and spoke of each as distinct thoroughfares. In many instances the depression in the ground of an Indian trail can be recognized today."

In Military Roads, Hulbert says that Sandy Alexander Nelms

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Vol. VIII, pp. 68-9.

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of Salem, Illinois, informed him that the old Kaskaskia Trace across southern Illinois "could, in early years, be followed by the camping-spots, where blue-grass sprang up when the prairie-grass was killed out. Blue-grass on the Illinois routes was the first sign of coming civilization."

By what ancient paths did my kinsmen seek their fortunes in the West? The Merritts of the Norfolk region left the Atlantic shore sometime between 1700 and 1800, I suppose, and became "back-settlers" in the Shenandoah Valley. My Samson forebears, leaving England -- or, as one descendant thinks, Scotland -- for a new world, seem to have travelled from New York, via Virginia, into Kentucky. Somewhere along their course a group of them encountered Indians, who killed all but two of the party. These survivors continued to Lexington, Kentucky, and thence into southern Indiana, where I pick up my immediate line, settled there sometime before 1826. Great-grandmother Martha Samson, née Apperson, had also come from Virginia, her native state, to Indiana. John Rennels, born in 1781, represents another paternal line which by ~~1829~~ 1832 had migrated from England or Ireland, via Delaware, Kentucky, and Indiana, to Illinois. His wife, Nancy Bland, whose ancestors seem to have had their beginnings in Scotland, was born in ~~Ireland~~, in 1787, and

followed the same route as her husband to a log-cabin in Illinois. A contemporary and parallel movement of the Conleys took them from North Carolina, by way of Indiana, to Illinois, ~~which they reached about 1836.~~ That other doughty son of the Virginia-Carolina region, Daniel Boone, was yet living in 1820, which was about the year the Conleys left North Carolina for their Indiana sojourn. Boone, however, had gone still farther west. In 1818, Fordham* wrote: "Boon (sic) has a settlement 280 miles west

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*Pp. 177-9.

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of us (that is, of southern Illinois), has got a new rifle this season, -- and is gone out to kill another bear before he dies: -- he is 80 years old." (He was, actually, eighty-three or -four.) There were, to be sure, fewer bears and Indians to be encountered when the Conleys made their last westward journey than when Boone and his contemporaries made their earlier ones, but by this time there were many new perils.

If one would know something of that most evil of periods, let him read The Outlaw Years, by Robert M. Coates, which records with harrowing detail the activities of such highway characters as "those terrible men, the Harpes," Samuel Mason, and John A. Murrel, along the dark traces of our then back-country. Let him study the Murrel technique of first ingratiating himself with the lonely traveler met in the wilderness, then murdering and robbing

him, and finally, after weighting the disembowelled body with heavy gravel, casting it into some convenient stream. Though my relatives may have enjoyed the security of travelling, in groups, a trail less bloody than the notorious Natchez Trace, still they faced real dangers, as did every traveler of those times. How terrifying to the children of these parties must have been the horrible tales then being told of slave-stealing and murder, of the gruesome mutilation of the bodies of countless victims along the very roads they followed!

Did the Merritts, I wonder, in their journey from Virginia to Illinois, in the 1850's, follow the Shenandoah Valley to the Clinch and proceed through Kentucky, thus treading in the moccasined footprints along the old Virginia Warrior's Path and tracing Boone's Wilderness Road? The Conleys must surely have travelled Boone's way. Did Joe Merritt and his group follow it, or did they "foot it" northward via the Pennsylvania Road, or "Pittsburg Pike"? It is most likely that they went by the Cumberland Road, which had evolved from the old Nemacolin's Path. This, the National Road, had reached Vandalia, Illinois, several years before the Merritts' arrival in that state. Was it on the Wilderness Road that the Samsons encountered the Indians and were all but annihilated? We shall probably never know. In the century and more that has elapsed, all knowledge of these various progresses of my people has disappeared even from the ghostly fragments of oral tradition, and their routes are as completely lost to us as are the obscure origins of the roads they followed -- "dark wood lanes unknown to civilized man, their soil heretofore pressed only

by the feet of Indians and wild beasts," yet destined to know "a never-ceasing ebb and flow of humanity."*

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* Hulbert, Vol. II, p. 79, quoting from Aboriginal Occupation of the Lower Genesee Country, by Geo. H. Harris, pp. 36-40.

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CHAPTER VII

"THE ILLINOIS."

"There was a section of Louisiana which, together with a section east of the Mississippi, had from an early day been called 'the Illinois' and continued to be so called until some time after the opening of the Nineteenth Century. Perhaps the junction of the Missouri and the Mississippi Rivers was its approximate centre, and the Ohio (sometimes the Arkansas) its generally recognized southern boundary; but to the east, west, and north its limits were undefined. Les Illinois, Los Ylinuezes, it was called."* Various and interesting are the forms. One old

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* The Early Far West, by W. J. Ghent (Longmans, Green & Co., N. Y., 1931). P. 3.

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map, that of Lewis Evans, dated "1755, with Pownall's 1776 Additions,"* marks the region: "The Western League or Welinis,

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* Hanna's The Wilderness Trail. Vol.II, p. 144.

(corruptly called Ilinois by the French.)" Land of the Iliniwek — which, in the language of that people, meant "Men"!

The first group of my entire clan to reach "the Illinois,"

1832.

seem to have arrived about ~~1829~~. The following is from a volume*

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*The Present State of the European Settlements on the Missisipoi (sic), With a Geographical Description of That River, Illustrated by Plans and Draughts, by Captain Philip Pittman. An exact reprint of the original edition, London, 1770; ed. by Frank Heywood Hodder (The Arthur H. Clark Co., Cleveland, 1906). Pp. 97-103.

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published half a century earlier: "The country of the Illinois is bounded by the Missisippi (sic) on the west, by the river Illinois on the north, by the rivers Ouabache and Miamis on the east, and the Ohio on the south. The air in general is pure, and the sky serene, except in the month of March and the latter end of September, when there are heavy rains and hard gales of wind. The months of May, June, July, and August, are excessive hot, and subject to sudden and violent storms; January and February are extremely cold; the other months of the year are moderate. . . . The soil of this country in general is very rich and luxuriant; it produces all sorts of European grains, hops, hemp, flax, cotton, and tobacco, and European fruits come to great perfection. The inhabitants make wine of the wild grapes, which is very inebriating, and is, in colour and taste, very like the red wine of Provence. The country abounds with buffalo, deer, and wild-fowl, particularly ducks, geese, swans, turkies, and pheasants. The rivers and lakes afford plenty of fish."

seem to have arrived about 1832. The following is from a volume*

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*Reprinted by permission of the publishers, The Arthur H. Clark Company, from Pittman (P.) The Present State of the European Settlements on the Mississippi, Edited by Frank Heywood Hodder. Pp. 97-103.

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published half a century earlier: "The . . .

The following quaint picture of a typical backwoods home in Illinois, though it refers to an earlier period, cannot be so very far from describing the first Rennels and Conley homesteads: "As the forest clearing expanded around the log hut of the settler, many were the farinaceous delicacies that covered his table; prominent among these were the Johnny or journey-cake, made of corn meal; hominy, or pounded maize thoroughly boiled, and other savoury preparations of flour and milk, in addition to the rich variety of game afforded by the chase. The furniture of their dwellings was of the simplest description. Most of the articles in common use were of domestic manufacture. . . . The huge fireplaces, filled with bright blazing logs, were favourite nestling places during the long winter evenings, when the snow-storm swept gustily around the rude dwelling, or the forest trees swayed heavily to and fro in the wintry blast."*

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* The History of Illinois, by W. H. Carpenter and T. S. Arthur (J. B. Lippincott & Co., Philadelphia, 1856). P. 127.

How difficult for us, living in an all but completely transformed world, to realize the primitive life of our very grandfathers! So great were the changes wrought during those decades between 1830 and 1860 — when "the center of population shifted from middle West Virginia to the longitude of Chillicothe, Ohio"* — that it is almost impossible for us, though but two or

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* The Sentimental Years: 1836 - 1860, by E. Douglas Branch (D. Appleton - Century Co., Inc., N. Y., 1934). P. 10.

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three generations removed, to picture the world as our father's father knew it. Still standing in Coles County, Illinois, is a log-cabin, built by some of my Rennels kin in 1833, the year in which Chicago was incorporated as a village, with but twenty-four voters. In the late 'Forties, travellers in and out of the future metropolis were glad to make use of its "plank roads," paying for that privilege a toll of thirty-seven and a half cents for a four-horse team, twenty-six cents for a single team, and twelve and a half cents when one entered the village on horseback. Gerhard* gives the increasing population of the terri-

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* P. 218.

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tory and, later, state as follows: 1810 - 12,282; 1820 - 55,211; 1830 - 157,445. It was not until 1842 that the first railroad entered Springfield, to the great astonishment of many of the inhabitants. "One old settler," relates Carlton J. Corliss,*

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* Trails to Rails: A Story of Transportation Progress in Illinois (Illinois Central System, Chicago, 1934). Pp. 18-19.

"expressed the fear that if the locomotive ever ran near his farm his cows would stop giving milk."

Only a decade or so before the advent of my people in Coles County, Fordham's Personal Narrative had reported: "Game is as plentiful here (in the region just south of Coles) as in other

parts of the U. S. east of the Mississippi. Bears, Deer, Racoons, and Beavers, are chiefly valued by the hunters. There are wolves, a very few panthers, and some elk in remote situations; Also Turkeys, Pheasants, American Partridges, prairie Hens, and innumerable Squirrels, which are delicious food." Another British

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Fordham's Personal Narrative. P. 119.

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traveller, Captain Basil Hall, quoted by Gerhard, mentions the

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Pp. 272-3 and 375.

"prairie-fowls, either in entire tribes, like our own domestic fowls, or in couples; the males rambling, and, like turkeys or peacocks, inflating their plumage, make the air resound with a drawled, loud, and melancholy cry, resembling the cooing of a wood-pigeon, or still more, the sound produced by rapidly rubbing a tambourine with the finger. The multitude of these birds is so surprisingly great, as to have occasioned the proverbial phrase, 'that if a settler on the prairie expresses a desire for a dish of omelets, his wife will walk out at night and place her bonnet on the open ground, to find it full of eggs on her return next morning.' The plain is literally covered with them in every direction, and if a heavy fall of snow had driven them from the ground, I could see myriads of them clustered around the tops of the trees skirting the prairie. They do not migrate, even after

the prairie is already settled, but remain in the high grass, near the newly-established farms." Gerhard adds that prairie-chickens were, in 1856, selling at from $1.75 to $2.25 per dozen, in different cities of Illinois.

As if to offset nature's bounty in the matter of wild food, raiment, and material for shelter, Illinois, before it had been properly drained of superfluous water, was no very healthy region. My parents still shudder at the thought of the quinine consumed in their battle against the ague. But Gerhard, in 1857,

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Pp. 266-8.

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defended the reputation of the state in this fashion: "Edward Harkness, Esq., of Southport, a resident in Peoria County, for twenty years, communicates the following: 'While travelling along the national road in Indiana, many years ago, I met a moving family. They had a light wagon, which contained all their worldly goods -- this had sunk into a deep mud-hole. The women had kindled a fire, were smoking their pipes, and at the same time bestowing upon their husbands all the terms of reproach they could muster, for bringing them "from a nice, beautiful country, into such a horrible place." During my stay, conversation with the old woman was about as follows:

"You speak of having come from a beautiful country. May I ask where you are from?"

Old woman. "'Way down below Norfolk, in old Virginny."

"Do you have the ague there?"

"Wall, we do have the ager proper bad sometimes, and the fever too."

"Musquitoes?"

"O Yes! they are bad most all the year."

"It is a fine place to raise corn, is it not?"

"Wall, when I was young we used to raise pretty good corn, but the land is so worn out, we can't get much now."

"Have you and your family generally enjoyed good health?"

"La me, no! we've been sick most half our lives."'"

But in the Illinois of those early days there was much ague, certainly, and many mosquitoes. With regard to the latter, one wonders if the very first settlers did not, like the Indians, "anoint themselves with bears' grease, in order to prevent their punctures."*

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* Sketches of Eighteenth Century America, by St. John de Crèvecoeur (Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1925). Pp. 109-10.

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And snakes! There were thousands of them in the alternating woods and prairies — "opens" — of Coles County and, indeed, all other parts of the state. Nowadays it is an event to discover a rattlesnake in central Illinois, just as it is news worthy of space in the local paper when an acre of virgin meadow is plowed under for the first time. But seventy or eighty years ago the rattlesnake and copperhead held as important a place in back-country conversation as did abolitionism or secession. Up in

Champaign County, only a few miles north of Coles, William Meharry, herding cattle, "rode horseback, snapping off rattlesnake heads with a long cattle whip, sometimes killing twenty-five in a day." Of Sangamon County and of the same period, Herndon, as quoted by Sandburg,* said: "I killed a hundred snakes

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*Pp. 120 and 207.

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in three-quarters of a mile ... rattlesnakes, vipers, adders, and copperheads. A rattlesnake rattles, a viper hisses, an adder spits, but a copperhead just sneaks." Nor need I go outside our own family for such testimony. Great-aunt "Booge" Conley used to declare: "Why, you could jes' <u>smell</u> the rattlesnakes in our timber!"

But, to return to pleasanter aspects of the life of those days, Harvey Lee Ross,* writing of that decade during which the

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*Pp. 61-5.

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Conleys came to Coles County, and of the region just across the Illinois River, says: "The deer roamed through the country by the thousands. Every other kind of game and fowl was abundant, and the rivers and small streams were full of fish. The bee trees were so numerous that white settlers and Indians could get all the honey they wanted, and there were groves of sugar trees all over the country from which an abundance of maple sugar was

made. The wild fruit was equally wonderful, there being no limit to the plums, crabapples, grapes, black- and redhaws, gooseberries, blackberries, dewberries and strawberries. Acres upon acres of wild onions could be found in the woods, and wild potatoes in great abundance. Potato creek, south of Spoon river, received its name from the great abundance of wild potatoes that grew on its bank. The hard freezing in the winter did not affect them and they were about as good to eat as Irish potatoes. . . . Smith's Prairie was celebrated for the numerous plum and crabapple orchards that grew round its borders. The large red and yellow plums grew there in such abundance that people would come from long distances and haul them away by the wagon-loads, and would preserve them with honey or maple sugar, which were the only sweetening we had in pioneer times."

A land of the "milk-sickness," perhaps, but surely a land flowing with milk and honey!

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE BANKS OF THE "AMBRAW."

In many respects, that portion of eastern Illinois -- the present Coles County -- in which my ancestors settled was, in the 1820's and '30's, still a part of the American frontier. I do not know why the Rennelses, Conleys, and, a little later, the Merritts chose old Stringtown and Liberty settlements for their new home, ~~unless it was because they found a church near and felt they would be not too far~~ -- six or seven miles -- from Charleston, the present county seat. ~~At any rate, here they settled.~~ My great-grandfather, John Conley, must have arrived there about ~~1826.~~ 1832. Jane, his wife, had apparently followed her own people thither, for her brother, James Rennels, had settled in that section about ~~1829.~~ that time.

The upper Embarrass River -- "Troublesome River," Hutchins's map of 1768* called it -- flowed through the woods and

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* Hulbert's Historic Highways. Vol. VIII, pp. 47-8 and 66-8.

"opens" of that region. The "Ambraw," my relatives still call this stream, giving the name somewhat the same phonetic spelling as Volney gave it in 1804: "Ombra." Of George Rogers Clark's brave crossing of the Embarrass, fifty or sixty miles below Liberty, Hulbert writes: "The year 1779 was to see as brilliant

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* Ibid. Vol. VI, pp. 165-6.

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an achievement in the West, as the East was to see in the capture of Stony Point. This was the recapture of Vincennes by Clark. Joined by an experienced adventurer, Colonel Francis Vigo, formerly of the Spanish service, Clark was persuaded that he must capture Hamilton, or Hamilton would capture him. Accordingly (after taking Kaskaskia), on the fifth of February, Clark set out for Vincennes with one hundred and seventy trusty men. In twelve days they reached the Embarras (sic) River, which was crossed on the twenty-first with great bravery, the men wading in water to their shoulders. On the twenty-fifth, Hamilton, the most surprised man in the world, was compelled to surrender. Within two weeks he was on his way to Virginia; where, being found guilty of buying Virginian scalps from the Indians, he was imprisoned, but was exchanged the year following."

This stream, made historic by Clark, was so muddy in the days when my relatives lived on its banks, that there still survives in our family a phrase descriptive of its condition when heavy rains had "r'iled" it up: speaking, for instance, of the weak coffee of thrifty housewives like my Aunt Annie Sipe, we in the family say, "Annie, this Lion Brothers' coffee of yours must've swum the Ambraw!" The stream, in modern Coles County, is no embarras to anyone wishing to cross it. No longer, I suppose, does its surface have "that singular appearance

called 'fever and ague blossoms.'"* Nor are there any longer

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Recollections of the Last Ten Years, by Timothy Flint (Alfred A. Knopf, N. Y., 1932; a first reprint from original edition of 1826). P. 304.

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deer, buffalo, or bear in the vicinity. Clark and his comrades, however, found them there in 1779 and, as Hulbert* says, "before their rousing fires, with venison and bear meat savoring the air, little wonder the night brought partial forgetfulness of the day's fatigue." The deer, if not the bear and buffalo, were still there when Great-grandfather Conley first crossed this malarial stream. On its banks at that time only a scattered population dwelt. Gerhard* states that in 1855 there were, in the

* (See footnote, over)

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P. 221.

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whole of Coles County, but 14,937 souls. In 1840, there had been, in a then larger Coles County, only 9,616. A scattered population, but a democratic one, surely. One of which the same story might be told as was related of Abe Lincoln's New Salem. A certain resident of that historic hamlet, on being asked who were the important citizens of the community, replied, not without scorn: "Important citizens! There were no important citizens. Everybody was an important citizen!"

"Our folks," my father, "Johnnie" Merritt, remembers,

Footnote:

. . . as Hulbert* says, "before

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*"Historic Highways of America" Series. Vol. VIII, p. 48.

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their rousing fires, . . .

"settled six or seven miles southeast of Charleston. The Five Mile House was between our place and town. I think the Stone family lived there. Maybe Doug Stone, who gave me my first chew of tobacco. Stringtown was below this," a settlement that included a blacksmith-shop, a store, and a few houses, all now vanished from the earth, these many years. On the Embarrass, when Johnnie was a boy, at least, and no doubt much earlier, stood a grist-mill, to which he was sometimes sent with grain to be ground.

"The land along (the) Embarras (sic) River," wrote Gerhard in 1857, "is not everywhere of the same good quality, consisting at the origin of the river chiefly of prairie lands, and further north of Charleston, of forests garlanding the banks at a breadth varying between two and six miles, extending even to ten miles below that place." A woodsy place. And such it remained, to a considerable degree, up into the 1890's, when my line and generation, who by that time lived in the neighboring, more open Piatt County, used to speak of our Coles kin as if the latter were living in some benighted backwoods land scarcely contemporary with our own.

The ~~"foreloper"~~ genearch of the family's Coles County group, ~~may, or may not, have been~~ my great-great-grandfather, John Rennels, ~~He~~ died at Stringtown, ~~killed by a falling tree,~~ in 1866. He ~~may have preceded or~~ had followed to Illinois his son James, who settled there about ~~1829~~ 1832. John Rennels, born in 1781, had come ~~from England, apparently,~~ to Kentucky, ~~via~~ from Delaware, ~~or~~ possibly via

Virginia. ~~(Another version gives his birthplace as Delaware, and suggests that his father was a soldier in the Revolution.)~~ No doubt the name was once Reynolds, though descendants quite consistently spell it Rennels. Some of them pronounce it "Runnels." Many of their elders, I feel sure, would not have known how to spell it. My own grandmother may have been among these, for, like 35,000 other good American-born Illinoisians of 1850,* she could neither read nor write. And I dare say her

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Gerhard. P. 229.

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mother, if asked to spell the name, would have sent Armilda or Mary Jane for the Bible, just as a certain woman in the Ozarks, after telling the census man she had a daughter "Pish," proved it by showing him, in the family Bible, the incontrovertible statement that on a certain date there had been born to her a child named Psyche. (I fancy it was the same good daughter of Missouri who told a book-agent, calling to sell her the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "We already got a book.") Great-great-grandfather John Rennels in 1805 had married Nancy Bland. ~~She seems to have been born in Ireland, of Scotch parentage, in 1787.~~ They had, in addition to James and Jane (my great-grandmother), at least ten other children. ~~From (c.) 1807 to 1824 they had lived in Kentucky.~~

Their son James was born near Richmond, Madison County, Kentucky, in 1807. At the age of seventeen he had moved with his

parents to Indiana. James at least, and probably his parents, settled in a new pioneer home ten miles from Little Orleans, Lawrence County, Indiana. In 1825, in that state, James married a Polly Connelly — as descendants of this line spell the name. About 1830, his sister Jane married, also in Indiana, one John Conley, my great-grandfather. ~~It seems very probable that this~~ John Conley and Polly Connelly, who had thus married sister and brother, were cousins. ~~related, though this is not established.~~ Polly, born in 1807, in Virginia, was the daughter of Effie Pennington and Joel Connelly. Effie Pennington, born probably in Grayson County, Virginia, in circa 1787, was the daughter of Cassandra Swathlander and the Reverend Charles Pennington. The latter, born in ~~Penn-sylvania, in~~ 1758, served in the Revolution from Pennsylvania. ~~that state.~~ He became a Baptist minister and may have preached in the Coles County community of which my relatives were a part. He died in Illinois in 1845. His wife was born in 1758, dying in Illinois in 1834.

Effie, the daughter of Cassandra and Charles Pennington, about 1806 married Joel Connelly. Joel, born in 1788, in what was once a part of North Carolina but now lies in Virginia, was ~~evidently~~ the son of Sarah Wilson and John Connelly. The latter was born in Ireland, in 1744, and, moving into the American West via North Carolina, died in 1798 — whether in Kentucky or in Illinois, it is not quite clear. His wife Sarah was born in 1746, and died ~~in Illinois~~ in 1824. These dates, I believe, mark

the earliest at all established approach to the true American frontier of our, or a related, ancestral line. One likes, indeed, to discover a genearch of so pioneer a time and locale as to have met death in "the Illinois" in 1798 — so soon after Clark had made history with his resolute crossing of the "Ombra"!*

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For the above data on Joel Connelly's parentage, I am indebted to Mrs. E. C. Goodwin, of Charleston, Ill., to whom I am grateful also for much other valuable help. She and others have made it possible to prepare this record, with its Mississippi Valley background, from a California workshop. Future search may reveal certain unavoidable errors caused by this handicap of distance.

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~~As previously stated, it seems very likely that there is connection between this, the line of Polly Connelly, and that of~~ My great-grandfather, John Conley, ~~It is with the family of this John and his wife that we are now concerned. He~~ was "John, the son of John." Between 1820 and '30, he had moved from North Carolina to Indiana, where he soon married Jane Rennels. The latter was born in 1812, probably in Madison County, Kentucky. They continued to live for a while in Indiana, where several of their children were born. Their offspring were: Sarah Ann, Elizabeth, Nancy, Cynthia, Armilda, Mary Jane, Susan, Irena, Elijah, William Taylor, James R., and John. My grandmother, Irena, was born in 1841. ~~1840, about four years after their coming to Illinois.~~

And so, we see, no small portion of the population then dwelling in and about Liberty and Stringtown was made up of the increasing household of John and Jane Conley and that of Uncle Jim and Aunt Polly Rennels, together with some of the brothers, parents, and grandparents of these. And two decades later, quite a little army of Merritts and Fitzpatricks was to join them.

I wonder if the cabin that first sheltered the John and Jane Conley family in Illinois, on their arrival there, ~~in 1826,~~ was not that of Jane's brother, Jim Rennels, with whom they would live until John Conley could raise his own. If so, that first shelter still stands, ~~Jim had reached the "Ambraw" by 1829. I suppose he had set to work at once to provide his family a home. In 1833, however, we find him erecting another,~~ "a double log-cabin" of square-hewn logs, with stone chimney. This still survives, after more than a century, and stands in Morton Park, Charleston. It is said to be the oldest cabin in Coles County. The structure, moved into Charleston from its original site east of the Five Mile House, was a gift to the Daughters of the American Revolution from Mr. Joel Jackson Rennels, ~~only~~ last living child of James Rennels, its builder. ~~The writer likes to think that his own ancestor, John Rennels, may have helped his son James to hew the logs that went into its making.~~ Who knows what other personalities connected with our chronicle may have joined in the log-raisin' that took place, that day in 1833.

when Jim Rennels invited his male neighbors to help him lift those sturdy timbers into place, and Aunt Polly her church-sisters to help her fry the many chickens consumed after so strenuous a task! About eight miles from Charleston, in a different direction -- on Goose Nest Prairie -- stood another cabin, built at about the same time or a little earlier: a simple structure that now and then sheltered a young fellow by the name of Lincoln -- Abe Lincoln.

No doubt John and Jim Rennels lent a hand at the building of the first John Conley cabin. One of the latter's granddaughters, herself now approaching eighty, has written: "When Grandfather settled on his place, it was very wild there. Wild animals prowled around. Grandma has told me stories about being alone in the old house. Her twin babies was born in this house. I think most all her children was born there." Of this first home in Illinois, another descendant says: "John Conley built a cabin six miles southeast of Charleston. It was of logs, with clapboard roof and stick chimney, plastered with mud. It had a puncheon floor, and no windows -- just an opening in the wall, covered with a cloth" dipped in hog's lard -- or perhaps in bear grease? My grandmother, Irena, "was probably born there. She was about the fifth child. They had thirteen children. All but one lived to be grown." Later, John Conley moved a mile or two east of his first homestead. Here he built another log-house. But this region was not wild enough for him, so he went

west a short distance, to a place "about four miles east of Charleston, close to the river, where the Deer were more plentiful. He was a great Hunter, a fine marksman. He deeded the land where Liberty Church stands, and later a cemetery was laid out there. That is where John Conley and William Merritt both sleep. Jane Rennels Conley is buried at Whetstone Cemetery, on the farm where she and her husband, John, first settled." Speaking of this old burying-ground, my father says: "It was called 'Whetstone' because the ground was full of a kind of soft stone that the neighbors used to gather for sharpening their scythes and other tools. The land wasn't much good for anything else."

Life — and Death. Death — and Life. An eternal cycle. A man, digging a fresh grave in the old cemetery, lifts with his pick a bit of whetstone naturally shaped to the curve of a scythe. He lays it carefully by and continues his digging — thinking meanwhile not so much of the dead as of the living, whose hunger he must meet with to-morrow's mowing. Death punctuates life at old Liberty, as elsewhere, but only as a comma, never as a period. Likewise, the chronicle of a family: it pauses here, is interrupted there; yet never does the thread break with any true finality. Death rules for a day; but Life goes on, through yet another generation.

CHAPTER IX

LIFE AT OLD LIBERTY.

What a host of cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandsires grouped themselves, in the 'Thirties and 'Forties, about the Conley and Rennels hearths! Of the latter, John Rennels would be the patriarch, until his death, ~~a falling tree crushed life from his body,~~ just after the close of the Civil War. His widow, Nancy Bland Rennels, died the following year, at the home of her daughter, Jane Conley. John and Nancy Rennels had ten children besides Jane and James. Several, if not all of these, they had near them in Coles County. And James and his wife, Polly, alone provided them with nine grandchildren. (James's line was especially prolific: in 1934 his descendants numbered almost five hundred.) The children of James and Polly had also their Grandfather Joel Connelly near them until 1853, their Grandmother Connelly until 1875. Joel's parents had long been gone, his father having died in 1798, his mother in 1824. But Joel's wife, Effie, did not lose her mother and father, Cassandra and Charles Pennington, until 1834 and 1845, respectively, so that some of the sons and daughters of James and Polly must have heard their Great-grandfather Pennington preach — and relate his experiences in the Revolution. Linked to all these folk were John Conley and

Jane Rennels and their twelve children. And in 1857, through the marriage of Irena Conley to Joe Merritt, this typical American group was increased by a score or two of Merritts and Fitzpatricks. How crowded must sometimes have been those cabins when an impromptu gathering brought even a fraction of these relatives under one roof!

Anyone entering one of these cabins in the old days would have found within just such a symphony of odors as the authors of a contemporary novel* have given to a fictitious habitation

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One Stayed At Welcome, by Maud and Delos Lovelace (The John Day Co., N. Y., 1934). P. 11.

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of early Minnesota: "the familiar captivating scent of home, a scent made up of the lingering mingled vapors of fresh bread, of new cider, of hot maple syrup, of roasting venison, of jellies boiling thickly, of newly split pine knots, of freshly sunned linen, of burning tobacco, and all the countless other appetizing flavors" of that day.

My mother, who sometimes visited in Coles County, says: "The Conleys was the cleanest people I ever saw. I can just see the window-ledges in the old log-cabin. They had scoured them until they was white as snow." Sarah Ann Conley — Aunt "Booge," we called her — was "spotless to her dying day. Once, during a sick spell, somebody washed out the burial clothes she had

stowed away. But Sar'Ann got well, and when she discovered someone had been foolin' with her linen, she took it right out and washed it over again." All the Conleys were "spotless," even for that soap-and-lye age. Next to godliness came the generous, but of course thrifty, use of the soap that the daughters of a household made in the big iron "kittle" to be found in every back yard of that day. The making of soap at home was a thing that continued into my own boyhood. I have often watched my mother make use of accumulated scraps of bacon rind for that purpose. I borrow from Ellen Hayes's Wild Turkeys and Tallow Candles*

The Four Seas Co., Boston, 1920. Pp. 83-4. Used by permission of Bruce Humphries, Inc., Boston.

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a description of the process: "The wood-ashes had been stored in a large wooden hopper, pyramid-shaped, vertex down. Soap-grease had also been saved during the year. The useful big kettle in the back yard was now rigged up and the soap-grease put on to cook. Water, many pailfuls, had to be carried and poured onto the ashes. What finally trickled out at the bottom of the leach was strong lye. The lye was added to the soap-grease and after a proper amount of boiling and stirring the soap was done. The result was a dark-brown translucent jelly -- soap indeed. A barrel of it, more or less, was stored away in the cellar to be used for washing clothing and dishes and floors." My Conley relatives being Irish and, I suppose, a bit superstitious --

Johnnie Merritt still dislikes to see the new moon over his left shoulder -- they no doubt followed the old rule to "make soap on the increase of the moon, so it will be thin."*

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When Antiques Were Young, by Marion Nicholl Rawson, (E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., N. Y., 1931). P. 60. Used by permission of E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., N. Y., publishers and copyright owners. - - - - - - -

No doubt one of the first things the Conley girls investigated upon the arrival of their new neighbors, the Merritts, was how much soap the latter used. In addition to homemade soap, the Conley women used plenty of elbow-grease. "My! how them women worked!" my father says. They not only labored about the Conley place, but sometimes "worked out" for others as well. And their battle against dirt -- towards which they seem to have had the same feeling as towards sin -- did not end with the final washing of their respective shrouds, but has continued, undiminished, to this day. Aunt Annie Sipe, in this and many other respects, is the Aunt Booge of her generation. Each of my sisters carries on. The great-great-granddaughters of Jane Rennels Conley no longer make their own soap, but they use modern scouring powders no less vigorously. I have never known any female with a drop of Conley blood in her veins who was "dirty." In this, even the husbands and sons of Conleys are tractable. They could not be otherwise. My father's shop is as clean and orderly as his wife's kitchen. But here my mother's influence also enters.

My father has described the Conley cabin as "a double

log-cabin, with a loft. Later, after all had gone but Jimmy and Sar'Ann, they tore down one side. They had wide slabs of stone for steps. Them stones was carried up from the Ambraw. So was the big slabs that they used for the fireplace. And they had flat rocks around the well. When I was a boy, they had an old-fashioned sweep and oaken bucket. Later they had a well with a windlass."

Aunt Annie Sipe has this to say about Jane "Runnels" Conley: "I remember my grandmother well. She was a short, fat woman, very clean, and a good worker. Johnnie and I would go there and stay with her. She would send us out to gather the eggs, then roast them in the fireplace."

Next in importance in the Conley household was Sar'Ann. The only time I ever saw her was at the funeral of my Grandmother Merritt, her sister Irena. Just before the service, we children of the Johnnie Merritt branch were admitted to the old house, having been told by our tactful, decorous mother not to come any earlier, since we were so numerous. As I entered Grandma's shining kitchen, where I had so often seen her busy with mop or broom, I was greeted by Aunt Sar'Ann, a very motherly sort of person, it seemed to me, though she was still an "old maid" -- the type of woman one sees on the covers of American magazines, making punkin -pies for the Thanksgiving dinner. She patted me affectionately on the head and ushered me into the parlor, where my grandmother lay. I still remember how incongruous it

appeared that Aunt Booge, with Death in the house, should be bustling about the kitchen and greeting me with a smile. But I am grateful to her for having managed in this manner one of my first audiences with Death, for I remember that after her warm welcome any childish terror I had felt, vanished as I stood at my grandmother's coffin and saw how beautiful she looked. I shall always regret that this was my last, as well as my first, meeting with Aunt Booge.

I remember her sister, Mary Jane, too, whom I saw on the same occasion. I recollect how very much she resembled my grandmother. I recall someone's telling me how religious, how good she was. A few years later I heard that she too was dead. My mother tells me that for some time before her death she used to speak of her eagerness to enter permanently the paradise of which she believed she was already catching glimpses. "If only I could tell you how beautiful it is!"

There was a tendency in the Conley girls towards spinsterhood, in the men towards bachelorhood. Aunt Booge and Uncle Jimmy never married, living together under the same roof from the day of Sar'Ann's birth to that of her death -- three-quarters of a century.

In comparison with the Merritts, the Conley boys and, more especially, their sisters were a rather somber, strait-laced lot. My mother has related to me an incident that would indicate that not even marriage completely destroyed the virginal biases and reluctances from at least the female portion of the Conley

group. Mother, then the young bride of Johnnie Merritt, once made a visit to one of the married Conley girls. Here, the very modest Mrs. Johnnie Merritt, meeting the growing son of Johnnie's virtuous aunt, made some quite innocent remark about his being a very handsome young fellow. The mother, bristling up like an old hen with new chicks, rebuked her with this bit of righteousness: "Married women are not supposed to talk thataway about young unmarried men!"

And, if there was an inclination on the distaff side of the Conley hearth towards extreme virtue, there was a corresponding one on the male side towards an excessive moodiness of spirit. I myself remember Great-uncle Jimmy Conley very well, from the occasional visits he made us, over in Piatt County. I think I have never known a more taciturn person. He used to come for a stay of two or three days during which he would utter scarcely a word beyond such unavoidable table phrases as "Pass the bread" or "I wouldn't care for any." I do not remember having ever seen him smile. This gloomy nature, I am inclined to believe, was not so much an inheritance from grave Celtic ancestors as it was a result of the gloom of generations of back-country living, not in Irish back-o'-beyonds — though their effect too may have lingered — but in American ones. I must here mention having myself experienced life on one of the last American "frontiers," at a place to which I go in the fir-covered mountains of western Oregon — appropriately called "Back-o'-Beyond." This, my return

to the simpler, more primitive modes of earlier forebears, has taught me the danger that lies in such situations, of absorbing too much of the somberness of dark and lonely woods. At Back-o'-Beyond many of my neighbors show the mark of years of solitude — a fact I state with reluctance in view of the more than compensating advantages of the happy life there. I believe that one of the definite elements in the American temper is this inclination towards a morbidity of spirit, the fruit of generations of isolated living in the shifting American back settlements. I see it manifesting not only in the Conleys but in the Merritts as well, though not nearly to so great a degree. It showed up in Joe Merritt in periods of silent abstraction at the forge and anvil, an abstraction that, combined with the Merritt quick temper, it was dangerous to interrupt! It still dwells in my father, who avoids the necessary graciousness to a new customer while lost in a job for an earlier one. When Johnnie's sons and daughters were children in Atwood, it used to be our painful daily duty to stand patiently at the anvil until he came out of his raptus to toss us the dollar that we had so timidly asked for and he had toiled so hard to earn. His ~~almost~~ sixty years of discipline at the infinitely patient hands of my splendid mother have done much to lift him out of the shadow of the Conley gloom. Nevertheless, it still survives, in him and in succeeding generations. I see it in several of his children, particularly in those in whom I recognize the Conley disposition. I see it in myself, in spite of the fact that, through my mother, I classify in general as a

Samson. It reappears in the generation following mine, at least one member of which has the Conley gloom and the Merritt temper, if not the ~~the~~ Fitzpatrick capacity to commit murder. With respect to this matter, as to many another, the union of a Samson with a Merritt has been, I think, very beneficial to our little fragment of the race: for more than half a century my good mother, with her capacity, as a Samson, to meet life optimistically, has battled against the Conley-Merritt pessimism, which was eternally forecasting our ending in the poor-house. As I analyze this point, I see, in several of her children, born with the Conley urge to sniff negatively at things, a determination also to emulate the Samson philosophy. We have a saying in the family that it is the Merritt in us that causes us to turn up our noses at things. I think that it is, on the contrary, the Conley in us. I believe it comes to us not so much from Grandfather Merritt who, in his later years at least, was sunny enough, as from our grandmother, Irena Conley. But it is more than "Conley", more even than racial: it is the fruit of a historical condition.

Carl Sandburg* tells us that "among the Lincolns in Hancock

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Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years. Pp. 487-90.

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County . . . and among other Lincolns in Kentucky, it was said they were odd fellows, ringing high with laughter and then dropping to depths of gloom, 'cantankerous but likable.' In their

blood seemed to run a melancholia they spoke of as 'the Lincoln horrors,' 'the Lincoln hypo.'" And of Abe himself, Herndon said: "Melancholy dripped from him." If my theory is sound, if the Lincoln and the Conley "horrors" was not a hereditary "taint" but an environmental product, then we must look for the "hypo" in a good part of the citizenry of Liberty and New Salem. And how all but universal we find it! Even as late as the first decade of our present century, the word "hypo" was much used in households like ours. I have heard my mother speak it more than once. ("Hippo," we pronounced it.) The fact that she employed it chiefly to refer rather scornfully to women who <u>thought</u> they were sick and were not, might indicate that the crest had been reached and that the pioneer "blues" had at last been conquered, just as the ague and the "milk-sick" had been routed from the Ambraw and, in Piatt County, the Lake Fork "bottoms."

At first it seems highly paradoxical that wherever we see this backwoods hypochondria we find also a very vigorously developed sense of humor. Lincoln, who dripped with melancholy, also cheered his own world and is still cheering ours with his unlimited supply of homely humor. But this, I believe, is not so paradoxical as at first appears. Everyone knows that Lincoln's "hypo" was not of the sort so scorned in my mother's happier days but a genuine and a very terrible misery that was inevitable in a situation in which men had to battle so intimately against the material forces of life. And it was but natural that they should

develop a compensating ability to meet those forces with the best weapon in the world: the habit of laughing at them. I believe I see this weapon being used by some of the Merritts and Conleys and their progeny to-day. I believe I see it in one of my brothers who, though we call him the Uncle Jimmy of our generation, possesses, along with his gravity, the typical American humor. Many of the stories we repeat around his name illustrate this. Here is one of them:

A customer, watching Little John and his father at work in the shop, wondered what their relationship might be. Big John, though in his seventies, had the figure and movements of a man of fifty. Little John, who has always carried about on his shoulders more than his share of the burden, looks his forty-odd years.

"Are you fellows brothers?" inquired the customer.

Laconically answered Little John: "Hell, no! I'm his father."

But it is unfair to my Conley kin to give the impression that gloominess was their only characteristic. My grandmother could be quite gay — for instance, at meetings of the Rebekahs! Nevertheless, the Conleys were no very jolly household. My father divided his days during the Civil War between the two households and, talking of those times, he has said: "I sneaked off to Grandpa Merritt's whenever I could. They was too many women over at the Conleys'." There is no ingratitude here for the home Aunt Booge and the others gave to Johnnie, Annie, and their

mother while Joe Merritt was away at the War. On the contrary, my father felt an affection for his Aunt Sar'Ann second only to that for his mother. When, just after the close of the War, Joe took his little family over into Piatt County to live, no one in Coles felt the separation more than did Sar'Ann, who had mothered the children as if they were her own. I think she continued to love them, throughout her life, not a whit less than Irena herself. Shortly before her death, Aunt Booge said to Johnnie: "Many's the time, honey, I've had to get up in the night on your account and tramp through the snow to a neighbor's for goose-grease or some other cure for croup. Seems to me you was always havin' the croup. They was times when I had a notion jes to let you die!" Like the mother of Ellen Hayes*, she had

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* Wild Turkeys and Tallow Candles. P. 110.

"slept with one eye open and one foot out of bed" whenever Johnnie or Annie was under her care.

Perhaps one of the reasons Johnnie liked to get away to the Merritts' was the fact of too much goose-grease, vinegar-and-onions, and coaloil-and-lard for ailing children under the Conley roof. Some of the medical practices of those days were pretty terrible, those of the profession itself being even worse, perhaps, than the homemade remedies then in use. On this subject let me again quote Harvey Lee Ross*, pioneer of western Illinois:

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* The Early Pioneers. Pp. 61-2, 82-4.

"There was a valuable plant that grew in the woods, called ginseng. The roots resembled very much the parsnips familiar in our gardens. Ginseng grew in the woods in the rich loam, and great quantities of it would be dug and sold to the merchants, who would sack it and send it to St. Louis. It was used for medical purposes and brought a good price. The Indians had a large traffic in digging ginseng and wild potatoes, which they sold to the merchants and settlers. But when the hogs became very numerous in the woods, they soon exterminated both the ginseng and the wild potatoes." Ginseng, I suppose, was used in the pioneer households of my Illinois relatives, too. It was still being sought for, in my own day, though not very successfully, in the few surviving patches of virgin woods.

Ross tells of other remedies of those earliest times. Local doctors, he says, in bleeding their ailing neighbors, "usually took from a pint to a quart of blood, dependent upon the age and size of the sick one. After the bleeding the patient would be given an emetic, and after he had been thoroughly vomited, he would be given a dose of calomel and jalop (sic), and then a walloping dose of castor oil. After all those horrors the patient would be taken through a course of blistering. . . . In the early days we had no dentists, and the regular doctors did all the tooth-pulling. They carried an instrument called a tooth-drawer; or 'pullikens,' shaped like a gimlet, but with a loose hook that was caught around the tooth, and then a twist of

the handle brought out the tooth -- sometimes. The price for pulling a tooth was twenty-five cents." In those earliest decades, when these barbarous practices did not prove successful, an Indian doctor was sometimes called in. "Rattlesnake oil was a favorite remedy." No wonder Johnnie, who lived, during Joe's absence, under the loving ministrations of his several Conley aunts, liked to go over to his Grandfather Merritt's. Yet, had he lived there, instead, the women of that household would probably have been no less solicitous of a running nose or green-apple pains in the stomach.

He helped there with the work, too. "I'd go over," he says, "and sit down by the fire a while and rub the cat -- I remember Grandmother had a little hole cut in the door, so it could go in and out -- and then I'd go out where the men was butcherin'. Grandpa would be gettin' the gambrel-sticks ready, or maybe makin' sausage. We loved our old grandfather! I remember his funeral, at the old United Brethern Church. I remember how Aunt Rebecca, his daughter, stroked his face and cried."

Sometimes Johnnie would join the Merritts not to help at any task but purely on pleasure bent. "Uncle Bein Merritt and some of us would go huntin'. We'd bring home frozen cottontail rabbits and hang 'em above the coals in Grandmother Merritt's fireplace." And as they watched the fat drip into the flames, Great-grandmother would perhaps recall that bear-grease and deer-suet went into the candles of earlier days, and Bein's

father might instruct the young hunters to put their firearms carefully away, quoting the old saying that "no gun's safe, even with lock, stock, an' bar'l missin'. I knowed a man beat his wife to death with the ramrod." This would provoke a story-telling contest, in which Bein and his brothers would vie with each other in "drawing the longest bow," to the great delight of the lad Johnnie. To another uncle, the "Big John" of his generation, the open fireplace and his yearning for adventure in the West, would bring to mind some such yarn as the following:*

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This supposedly true story, credited to the famous scout, Moses E. Milner, is told by Franklin W. Hall in his Introduction to California Joe, by Joe E. Milner and Earle R. Forrest (The Caxton Printers, Ltd., Caldwell, Idaho, 1935). Pp. 25-6. Used by special permission of the copyright owners.

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"I read in a book how Californy Joe, the scout, stopped at a mountain cabin and found a couple o' women in front o' the hearth. The old lady was sittin' smokin' her pipe and a raw-boned girl was standin' close to the fire. 'Sal,' says her ma, 'they's a coal under your foot.' And Sal, without flinchin', asks, 'Which foot, ma?'"

CHAPTER X

GOD IN THE BACK SETTLEMENTS.

The Conley girls having ascertained that the Merritts from Virginia were fairly good Christians and not too "dirty" — I think the Merritt family may not have been quite so "scratchy" — and the Conley males having determined that the Merritt boys were not too wild for chaste association with their sisters, the children, youths, and elders of the two households would soon be attending school together, going to revival meetings in a body, and sharing in general the amenities and asperities of life on the Ambraw.

The church in those days was the natural center of all social life in a community like Liberty. It was much more than an outlet for the religious urge. It and the district school — often housed together — were practically the only places to which the Conleys and Merritts of the American back-country could go to feed their hunger for human intercourse. No one can appreciate better than those who have known the life of isolated groups like that at Liberty the words of George Eliot: "the remedial influences of pure, natural human relations." There are few who, living such a life, would have the self-sufficiency to forgo the privilege of joining neighbors in a

weekly pilgrimage to the place that singing-school made merry, weddings made both solemn and gay, and Death itself made hallowed. The country church was the hearth of the community-family, just as the broad fireplace in every cabin was the natural gathering point for each unit of the larger group. It was at the neighborhood church, as we shall see, that Joe Merritt and Irena Conley first met. But the Conley girls, though they may indeed have attended Sunday service and midweek prayer-meeting somewhat for the sake of finding eligible husbands, went also for the good of their souls. For the Conleys were very religious.

"Talk about bein' religious!" my father says, "if the Conleys wasn't! I remember one Sunday Aunt Sar'Ann and me went out to give the cows, Pink and Piedie, some feed: it was such a dry season that they couldn't find anything for themselves. It kind o' troubled me to be workin' that way on the Sabbath and I asked Aunt Booge about it. She quoted some passage from the Bible, that it was never evil to feed the hungry." Or if the Conley fire went out on Saturday night, it would be no sin for Johnnie to go next morning to one of the neighbors for live coals.

Evidently the Brethren of those days were, for all their grave religiosity, not so literal as, for example, the early Presbyterians: "Dr. Cathcart (a post-Revolution minister visiting York, Pennsylvania), in order to present a fine appearance, shaved himself on Sunday morning. To sharpen his razor, in the absence of a hone, he used a leather-covered Bible. . . . His

eloquent sermon on that Sunday so impressed the elders that within a few days they met with some determination to give him a call. The opinion was unanimous, save that of the elder at whose house the reverend Doctor stayed. He very strenously objected. While he praised his eloquence, he said: 'I will have none of him. He strapped his razor on the Word of God.'"*

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From the address of Mr. Grier Hersh, in Proceedings of The Scotch-Irish Society of America, Eighth (1896) Congress (Pubd. by the Society, Nashville, Tenn., 1897). Pp. 344-5.

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Most of my Conley relatives seem to have been either Baptists or United Brethren. This latter was a sect well suited to the simple tastes and ideals of my forebears — especially the Conleys. As the Reverend H. A. Thompson has written of this church, "she owes little or nothing to the influence of great names, great wealth or high culture. Her early ministers were men taken from the forest, the plow, the workshop, who could preach on the Sabbath while they supported their families from the labor of the week. They found their adherents among men and women in private life, who were humble like themselves and earned their daily bread by the sweat of their brows."*The

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Our Bishops: A Sketch of the Origin and Growth of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ As Shown in the Lives of Its Distinguished Leaders, by H. A. Thompson, D.D., LL.D. (U. B. Pubg. House, Dayton, Ohio, 1906). P. 227. Permission Otterbein Press, Dayton.

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church was founded on the devoted work of Philip William Otterbein. After this good man my great-uncle, "Bein" Merritt, was named by his religious parent, William. "Bein's" mother, though she may have been somewhat less "churchy," finished her busy life, also, with a reputation for great goodness. At least some of the Conleys, too, were loyal to the Brethren organization up into my own day.

But whatever the spiritual inclinations of my kin, like all their contemporaries, they must have drawn into their lives much both of good and evil from the wave of religious emotion that followed all settlers into the dark borders of the land. For we are now thinking of those years when circuit-riders like that old "son of thunder," Peter Cartwright, were still going horseback from state to state, preaching a God of hell-fire and brimstone and, at funerals, a deity not so very much gentler. Reading Cartwright's autobiography, one wonders if the whole country was not mad. "A new exercise broke out among us, called the jerks....I have seen more than five hundred persons jerking at one time. To see those proud young gentlemen and young ladies, dressed in their silks, jewelry, and prunella, from top to toe, take the jerks, would often excite my risibilities. The first jerk or so, you would see their fine bonnets, caps, and combs fly; and so sudden would be the jerking of the head that their long, loose hair would crack almost as loud as a wagoner's whip." A certain "very large drinking man cursed the jerks, and all religion. At length he fetched a very violent jerk, snapped

his neck, fell, and soon expired, with his mouth full of cursing and bitterness. I always looked upon the jerks as a judgment sent from God." Little wonder that one old settler, in an isolated district of Illinois, had the temerity to tell Cartwright that he had moved into this fastness to escape all contact with Methodist preachers, with their "hell fire and damnation." Or that a certain young woman in one of Peter's congregations so disliked seeing her two sisters kneel at the mourners' bench that she opened a phial of hartshorn under their noses in a desperate effort to arouse them.

But, in fairness, let the picturesque old circuit-rider be his own eulogist: "A Methodist preacher in those days, when he felt that God had called him to preach, instead of hunting up a college or Biblical institute, hunted up a hardy pony ... and with his library always at hand, namely, Bible, Hymn-Book, and Discipline, he went through storms of wind, hail, snow, and rain; climbed hills and mountains, traversed valleys, plunged through swamps, swam swollen streams, lay out all night, wet, weary, and hungry, held his horse by the bridle all night, or tied him to a limb, slept with his saddle blanket for a bed, his saddle or saddle-bags for his pillow, and his old big coat or blanket, if he had any, for a covering. Often he slept in dirty cabins, on earthen floors, before the fire; ate roasting ears for bread, drank butter-milk for coffee, or sage tea for imperial; took, with a hearty zest, deer or bear meat, or wild turkey, for

breakfast, dinner, and supper, if he could get it." And to this praise of the old backwoods preachers in general, one can add much with reference to Cartwright in particular. He it was who had the courage to fling these words into the very face of that other fiery spirit, Andrew Jackson: "Who is General Jackson? If he don't get his soul converted, God will damn him as quick as he would a Guinea negro!" (And Old Hickory liked him for it.) Peter it was, too, who, on being challenged to a duel, had the horse-sense to reply: "We will step over here into this lot, and get a couple of cornstalks; I think I can finish you with one." For good, hard sense, I think this is equalled only by Abe Lincoln's reported choice of weapons, in a similar situation: "cow-dung at five paces."* And, if this is not praise enough of

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Sandburg's Abraham Lincoln. P. 182.

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Cartwright, let us remember that, among his many other activities, he found time and energy to conduct no less than five hundred dispiriting backwoods funerals.*

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Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, The Backwoods Preacher (Cranston & Curts, Cincinnati). Pp. 48-51, 192, 231, 243, 330-1, 353, 366, and 522.

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The "spiritual" frenzy of which we have just been speaking is, I suppose, universal if not eternal. It still goes on. It throve

each winter, during my own youth, in most rural churches. Yet I doubt if it ever flourished more spectacularly than in the days we are discussing.

It is not likely that even the most introspective of Conleys ever "whooped it up" much at these emotional orgies. And I think the Merritt response was somewhat like my Grandfather Merritt's reaction to "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" on Memorial Day. I know that his brother Bein went to these meetings out of sheer deviltry. My father says: "Bein used to tell us about the revival meetings at Liberty. He said it was no use to go to the mourners' bench in the hope of kneelin' next to some pretty girl, cause some other good Christian was sure to get his hands up her skirts before you did. Bein told about a good sister who got excited and went dancin' around the church shoutin', 'I feel like a wine-cask without a bunghole!' About that time another sister got saved and went prancin' down the aisle shoutin', 'I feel jus' like Sister Smith, like . . . '" — but the climax to Bein's story is unquotable. And Bein was the heathen whose good Christian parents had named him after the "Brethern's" saintly founder! Young Otterbein cannot have been approved by the Conley women. But his young niece, Annie Merritt, liked him. She used to say, "I'd 'a' married him if he hadn't been my uncle." And Bein used to pay her the same compliment. Soon after the marriage of my parents, young Johnnie Merritt and "Dodie" Samson, Bein paid them a visit. When the young uncle advanced to kiss the bride, the latter modestly offered her cheek.

Bein met this iciness with the words, "That's no way to kiss! Johnnie, why don't you teach her how to kiss?"

Many besides my irreverent great-uncle found flaws in the "spirituality" of those revivals. I see an eloquent commentary on the sexual tone of many of these gatherings in the statement once made to me that, because of the increase of new babies that often followed them, there was at one time, I think in Pennsylvania, a law relative to this wholesale illegitimacy known as "The Law To Suppress The Quaker Evil." Robert M. Coates, in The Outlaw Years, says: "After the meeting would come the

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Pp. 222-3.

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let-down. . . . People would dash into the woods crying that the millennium was at hand. Others gave themselves up to long drinking bouts or fell to fighting savagely. Still others, young men and girls, fused their religious ardor with more personal impulses: 'There may be some who think a camp-meeting is no place for love-making,' wrote a contemporary with considerable insight. 'If so, they are very much mistaken. When the mind becomes bewildered and confused, the moral restraints give way and the passions are quickened and less controllable. For a mile or more around a camp-ground the woods seem alive with people; every tree or bush has its group or couple, while hundreds of others in pairs are seen prowling around in search of some cozy spot.'"

This seemingly paradoxical association of religious excitement with the increase of woods colts suggests another very American anomaly: the "bundling" of even more puritanic days. If there was any bundling still going on in the Coles County of those days — it was practiced in Pennsylvania, at least, as late as 1845* — I am sure it was frowned upon by the Conley and

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*"While 'bundling' has been defended by many writers, as being free from objections, an elderly man who lived as a boy in a 'bundling' region, stated definitely to the writer that the practice served simply as a means of obtaining sexual satisfaction, preliminary to the usual marriage; but that, if it did not end in marriage, the participants were in no way censured by their elders." — David H. Keller, M.D., in Sexology, April, 1934.

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Merritt women. It is not unlikely, though, that their mothers or grandmothers felt differently about it. Marion Nicholl Rawson*

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In her From Here To Yender. Pp. 148, 157-9.

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writes: "The old custom of 'bundling' which was prevalent in some isolated sections of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and the New England States, was carried on in the beds of the past. One-room homes, long distances between farms, scarcity of candles and wood, and inability to keep warm . . . were some of the reasons for turning to the bed for purposes of visiting and privacy. Webster, in 1864, says: 'Bundle, To sleep on the same bed without undressing,

applied to the custom of a man and woman, especially lovers, thus sleeping.' This custom grew up gradually and was countenanced by the parents of young girls who often had no other way of visiting with their admirers. While results may have been unfortunate in some cases, there is evidence that the habit of bundling persisted for many years in our country, without harm. These verses from a long poem on the subject were written probably about the last of the 1700s:

> Nature's request is, give me rest,
> Our bodies seek repose;
> Night is the time, and t'is no crime
> To bundle in our cloaths.
>
> Since in a bed, a man and maid
> May bundle and be chaste:
> It doth no good to burn up wood;
> It is a needless waste."

Bundling or no bundling, in the Conley household, as in all others of that day, "the bed was the most important thing in the house, barring the chimney place." And the Conley beds, I am sure, were not only chaste but hygienic also. "A housewife of repute guarded the perfection of her beds as she did the morals of her children." The female descendants of Jane "Runnels" Conley would still regard the presence of bedbugs in their homes as cause for moral shame. I do not know that Jane and her daughters, like Americans of the 1700's, guarded against this humiliation by building their beds of sassafras wood — of which there was abundance in Coles — but I do know that they took other equally effective precautions. In an age when featherbeds were handed down from one generation to the next, it was nothing less than a moral duty to keep those feathers immaculate.

Apropos of this, one cannot help wondering if some descendant of Nancy Bland Rennels may not still rest his head each night on the remnant of one of her feather-beds, unconscious that the contents of his pillow may have been taken, not from domesticated fowl, but from owls, hawks, wild pigeons, and turkeys that Great-great-grandfather killed. Or perhaps the old New England superstition had reached the Rennelses and Conleys at some point in their westward progress and warned them "You will suffer when you die, if you lie on a pillow stuffed with the feathers of a wild fowl."* (Footnote, over)

Those of the Conley "females" — as I suppose women were still, without any thought of disparagement, being called at that period — who did marry, seem to have been careful to select only God-fearing spouses. Nancy married Franklin Johns, described as "a real church goer. You could hear him sing blocks away. He was famous in the neighborhood for his bass voice." Their son, Riley, became a minister. The Merritt-Conley alliance, through Joe and Irena, was strengthened when this Riley Johns married Joe's young sister, Rebecca Jane Merritt, herself "a very devout Christian." As we have seen, a related Connelly group, then dwelling near my own Conleys, included the Reverend Charles Pennington, a minister of the Baptist Church.

My father's sister, writing of the days when she and Johnnie were living with Conley relatives, during the War, says: "Before you got to the church, you could hear them shouting for

(Footnote:)

... wild fowl."*

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* From Marion Nicholl Rawson's Candle Days. P. 88. By permission of the publishers, D. Appleton-Century Co., N. Y.

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miles. They would be out in the woods praying before time to go inside the church. Once Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Booge took me with them. Booge called my attention to the loud praying, long before we reached the church. She said she didn't approve of such goin' on. She first took me in the amen corner but I was so scared she had to take me to the back of the building. It was a very old United Brethern Church, with a plain steeple. Everyone who lived around there was religious. It was surrounded by thick woods."

After Joe's return from the War, he and Irena used to take Johnnie and Annie over to the elder Merritts' place to spend the Sabbath. Annie, many years later, wrote: "Most every Saturday afternoon Dad, Mother, John, and I would go to Grandmother's and stay all night. Grandma and Grandpa was quite religious. We children — Aunt Mat, Bein, Check, John, and myself — would stay at Grandmother's while the older ones were at church. Then Bein would take us home — about five miles."

Just as Hoosiers of to-day refer to the winter of 1816-17 as "the winter of eighteen-hundred-and-froze-to-death," so do many contemporary Illinoisians date the arrival in the state of a great-grandfather or the marriage of grandparents as so many years after "the sudden freeze" of 1836, when a violent, icy wind, arriving before men busy at their tasks were conscious of its severity, lowered the temperature from 40 degrees above to 20 below zero. There is a tradition that the Conleys reached Illinois in 1836. In that case they would have experienced this dreadful storm, in which men are said to have frozen fast to

their sleet-covered saddles, for it took place on the 20th of December of that year. It must have been soon after "the year of the sudden freeze" that John Conley deeded to the local congregation the ground on which Liberty Church now stands. Later, a cemetery was laid out there. In this and the nearby Whetstone burying-ground -- the latter on the site of the original Conley homestead -- many of my relatives lie buried. Secure are they now from the summer's prostrations and winter's killing blasts. Aware are they now of the True God whom, if they failed to find Him in the "jerks" and trances of old Peter Cartwright, they must at least have glimpsed in the simple, wholesome lives, close to Nature, that they and their neighbors then lived.

CHAPTER XI

JOE CARRIES THE MAIL.

During the period just preceding the Civil War, my grandfather, Joseph Wilson Merritt, served his country and government in a capacity calling for as rigorous if not so perilous a life as that of a soldier: carrying the mail between Paris, on the eastern border of Illinois, and Monticello, near the center of the state. I believe his appointment was under President Buchanan, his services approximating the presidential term, 1857-61. The trip was made, of course, on horseback, one circuit being completed each week. Climbing into his saddle at Paris, Joe would make Old Hermitage post office his stopping place that night. Next day he would continue to Monticello. Returning, he would spend the third night also at Old Hermitage Inn. The fourth day would bring him back to Paris, whence, I suppose, he would ride down to his family at Liberty. Here "he would get the saddle blisters in shape for the next week."

One wonders over what remnants of Indian traces, and even buffalo trails, Joe's pony may have travelled. Danville, just above Paris, was the site of what had once been the hub of a number of radiating Indian paths. In the 1820's, that "Paul Revere of the Prairies," Gurdon S. Hubbard, young agent for the American Fur Company, had a pack trail from Danville, through what later

became Piatt, Moultrie, Shelby, and neighboring counties, to old Vincennes. Joe Merritt's route through Coles and Edgar Counties must have closely paralleled, if not actually followed, the ancient Kaskaskia and Detroit Trail, blazed sometime after 1700.* To portions

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Corliss. Pp. 3, 5, and 12.

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of the route, I dare say, one might have applied the directions given "by a southern rural commentator: 'Just cut a right of way through the woods, and trust to God for the rest.'"

We, of these ultra-modern decades, have continually to remind ourselves in how different a world our grandfathers, and even our fathers, dwelt. Writing of a period but twenty years previous to those of which we are now thinking, Alvin F. Harlow, author of Old Post Bags* says: "The commandant at Fort Dearborn

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D. Appleton & Co., N. Y., 1928. Pp. 276, and 292-300.

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handled Chicago's mail until 1831 when the first government post office was established. Postmaster Jonathan Bailey had his office in a log house built by John Kinzie, one of the first settlers." In 1826, it was required that mail carried on horseback should be "covered securely with oil cloth or bearskin against rain or snow, under a penalty of $20 for each time the mail is wet without such covering." In the Chicago and other regions it was sometimes enclosed in a canister covered with untanned deer hide.

From the Diary of Dr. Thomas Flint: California to Maine and

Return, 1851-1855,* I borrow the following as giving a correct

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Reprinted from the Evening Free Lance, Hollister, Calif., c. 1924. Pp. 9-15.

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picture of the life of Joe Merritt while carrying the mail through the same region and in the very decade of which Flint here writes:

"Wednesday (March) 16th (1853): Called at 2 o'clock A.M., went aboard cars at 2:30. No breakfast, nor could we get a mouthful until we arrived in Indianapolis at 2:30 o'clock P.M. The R. R. was new, rough, and no stations by the way. Arrived in Terre Haut about 5 o'clock. The end of railroad on the west. The balance of the trip to the Pacific must be made by horse-back or afoot. Stopped at the Prairie House.

Thursday 17th: In Terre Haut. Preparing for the journey across Illinois. Light rain.

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Saturday 19th: Left for Paris, 22 miles across (the Wabash) river in Illinois. Pleasant weather. Roads as bad as mud can make them. Arrived about sunset.

Sunday 20th: In Paris. Attended the Presbyterian church in the morning. Hymns lined and the Chorister led the singing, making the most ludicrous grimaces. In the afternoon rode out 10 miles to Bloomfield. Found a hotel with good beds. Still pleasant.

Monday 21st: Rode out to Ridge Farm. Called at George W. Hayworts (sic) to see an acquaintance sister Ann made when she was in that section.

Tuesday 22nd: Took dinner with friend G. W. Hayworth. From there went to Georgetown. Stopped at the Dunseth House.

Wednesday 23rd: Called in forenoon upon G. W. Holloway. . . . Got two horses shod. Clothed Lewell in a rubber suit as he could not stand the chilly weather on account of fever from change of climate. Put off across the prairie for Sidney, 28 miles, where we arrived about sunset. Cold, bleak, windy ride. Geese, ducks, prairie chickens seen in abundance.

Thursday 24th: Called early after a good night's rest. Lewell troubled with tooth-ache after being filled. Dined at Urbana. Bixby had his tooth 'hauled.' Shiretown of Champagne County. Arrived at Middletown House for the night. 24 mile ride for the day. Six beds in a 7 x 9 room. Fried eggs floating in lard, almost the universal food in this part of the world. Pleasant weather.

Friday 25th: Left in good time. Dined at Mt. Pleasant. Cold, raw, windy weather. Arrived at Leroy at sunset. Roads across the prairie. Muddy of worst kind. 25 miles. Clear at sunset.

Saturday 26th: Rode from Leroy to Bloomington, the county seat of McLean County. Could not get to put up in Lexington but were fortunate in getting an invitation to spend the night at a private house in Twin Grove, the best we have found in Illinois.

Thursday 31st: Beds last night good, but most miserably made up, could scarcely sleep in them. Breakfast decidedly poor. Flapjacks and molasses, the only eatable substance. Dined in Brooklyn, a

small village. Started for Augusta but missed the road and got Pulaski. Put up at a Methodist tavern. Rather unpleasant on account of a sick child. Distance today, 40 miles.

. . .

(April) 7th: Hard sleeping chance — not straw enough on bed cords.

Sunday 17th: Spent the day at Mrs. Newlands, a widow with two daughters and a son. Fashion of the country for belles and beaux to get together Sunday nights. The son was away, so when we returned, not being in the courting line of business and occupying the room with the one the young man would return to, some time towards morning we set the chairs against the door, so when he came in there was a grand racket, much to his chagrin when called upon to explain at the breakfast table.

April 19th: To Eden C. Downings for the night. Small house, and the bed given us was foot to foot with the family bed where a brat of a youngster kept us awake until after midnight yelling to have the candle lighted, which the mother did not care to do.

21st: In severe thunder storm. Used my saddle for an umbrella. Reached a place marked on the map in large letters, St. Albans. Made inquiry for the town and was shown a lot of stakes for the corners of a lot of lots. One pretty fair house but could not be accommodated for the night but got shelter in a small hut already well filled with a family; but it was on the extension principle, for two sets of trundle beds were drawn out from under the big one, whilst we were stowed away in a corner left —

cooking utensils and tin dishes decidedly short; however, fried eggs, bacon and corn bread were at our disposal, with saxafras tea for breakfast.

Thursday 28th: Awakened by flashes of lightning and rattling of thunder to look out upon severe storm which lasted all day, so did not start out, for the streams were bank full.

(May) 5th: Still a shepherd with a dog, the first day I have had one. Should have a gun for the wolves are troublesome, not so much so on the prairie as near timber."

Not unlike the journeyings of this party must have been the daily life of my grandfather. He sometimes spoke to me of the hardships and even dangers of the trip made regularly across three counties. I remember in particular a vivid account he once gave me of a terrific wind-storm that forced him to dismount and cling to the tall grass then growing on the prairies of Illinois. This giant growth of wild grass might be a peril, no less than a refuge. A contemporary of Joe's, Mr. J. R. Cantrall,* says: "At

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In the Tuscola (Ill.) Journal, Mar. 8, 1923.

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that time (1862), if people had occasion to cross the prairie when the grass was dry, they carried matches as a safeguard against prairie fires. If a fire was coming they could burn a zone where they would be safe from the fire, which would often outrun a horse."

Writing of early Fulton County, Illinois, Harvey Lee Ross says: "There is one thing that has altered the looks of the country very

much since it was first settled, and that is the extensive growth of young timber and brush, unknown in pioneer times. Before the county was settled by white people, prairie fires were permitted to sweep through the country every year, and they destroyed what is now (1899) called 'barrens' and underbrush. The smooth prairies came square up to the distinct groves of large timber." Ross,*

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Pp. 62 and 141.

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writing of a region about seventy miles west of that through which Joe Merritt's mail route took him, says: "There was not a house or habitation from Springfield to Macoupin, a distance of eighteen miles. The whole country was covered with high grass, in many places extending above the backs of our horses."

Timothy Flint, in Recollections of the Last Ten Years,*

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~~Alfred A. Knopf, N. Y., 1932, a first reprint from original edition of 1826.~~* Pp. 127 and 231-2.

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recording journeys of the period 1815-25, says the same: "We . . . rode up another rich and charming prairie (in the angle of the Mississippi and the Illinois), with the grass sometimes as high as our heads, on our horses. . . . I have often witnessed in this country a most impressive view, the burning of the prairies, visible in all parts of Missouri, but nowhere with more effect than in (the vicinity of) St. Louis. The tall and thick grass . . . is fired, most frequently at that season of the year called Indian summer. The moon rises with a broad disk, and of a bloody hue, upon the

smoky atmosphere. Thousands of acres of grass are burning in all directions. In the wide prairies the advancing front of flame often has an extent of miles. Many travellers, arrested by these burnings, have perished. The crimson-coloured flames, seen through the dim atmosphere, in the distance seem to rise from the earth to the sky. The view, before the eye becomes familiarized with it, is grand, I might almost say terrific; for nothing has ever given me such a striking image of our conceptions of the final conflagration."

Another and contemporary picture — a midwinter one — of the route Joe Merritt followed is provided by Gerhard: "In the winter,

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P. 275.

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the prairie presents a melancholy aspect. Often the fire, which the hunters annually send over the prairies, in order to dislodge the game, will destroy the entire vegetation, giving to the soil a uniform black appearance, like that of a vast plain of charcoal; then the wind, sweeping over the prairie, will find nothing which it might put in motion, no leaves which it might disperse, no halms which it might shake. No sooner does the snow commence to fall, than the animals, unless already before frightened away by the fire, retire into the forests, when the most dreary, oppressive solitude will reign on the burnt prairies, which often occupy many square miles of territory."

Even with such possibility of encountering disaster in the form of prairie-fire, cyclone, or blizzard, Joe, like riders of

the Pony Express, must not fail to get the mail through. He was in a situation somewhat like that of the still earlier riders who, on leaving Mexico City for the missions and presidios of Upper California, were enjoined to "house with lions or sleep with rattlesnakes, but never delay the King's letters."* Joe would meet no

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"The Knave," in the Oakland (Calif.) Tribune, Aug. 11, 1935.

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lions, but plenty of rattlesnakes, some deer, and much small game.

One wonders what he and others like him were paid. Very little, probably. Old Post Bags* shows how meager was the compensation

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P. 260.

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for work in the early American postal service. Referring to pre-Revolution days, the author states: "At Newport it was said, 'there are two post-offices, the King's and Peter Mumford's' (Mumford being the postrider to Boston), and that Mumford had the greatest revenue — about one hundred pounds a year." I doubt if Joe received as much. Laborers on the Illinois Central railroad received a dollar and a quarter per day in the early 'Fifties. But riding horseback across the prairies was a much freer life, certainly. (Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine Joe adapting himself also to the rough life of the six to ten thousand men employed, during good weather, in the building of the line which, at its completion, in September, 1856, was the then longest railroad on the American continent.*)

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Corliss. P. 28.

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Among Joe's duties was that of collecting the proper fee from the recipient of each letter delivered. He had also to keep a record of all letters carried: who sent them, who received them.

Mr. John E. Baskin,* a citizen of Douglas County for the past

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Writing in the Tuscola (Ill.) Journal, Oct. 24, 1935, following.

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seventy-five years, gives some interesting data on the old families and settlements served by Joe on his star route. On Joe's records would perhaps appear the name of Daniel Cassaday who, coming from Kentucky, in 1829 settled on a farm south of Paris, one of the first to be entered in Edgar County. Joe's services were in the days before the Illinois Central had been built through the town of Arcola. Joe would stop at Old Hermitage Inn, situated between the present towns of Arcola and Bourbon -- then called Okaw and Bagdad, respectively. Other villages on or near the route were New Albany (now Camargo), Nipantuck (Hugo), The Switch (Galton), and Mackville or "Lickskillet," the latter near the present Atwood. As we shall see, Joe later settled at Mackville, following his return from the War, and spent his last years at Atwood.

Almost as familiar to him as his parents' home at Liberty must have been Old Hermitage Inn. This hostelry was conducted by Thomas Kearney, whose son James was appointed postmaster there in 1856. A sister of James helped him in his duties. Her son, Harvey L. Moore, Custodian of the Piatt County Forest Preserve, at Monticello, says: "Uncle Jim ran a grain office where Arcola now stands."

Here he exchanged salt, flour, fish, and other products for grain, wool, and vegetables. "During my mother's four years as assistant postmaster, Joe Merritt carried the mail across eastern Illinois, stopping at my uncle's inn. It was Uncle Jim who gave Arcola its name -- he had been reading about Napoleon's victory over the Austrians at Arcole. . . . Uncle was a lover of horehound candy, and Joe brought him some on one of his trips. The heat of the sun and of the horse's body melted it into a sticky mess, which Uncle had to break up with a hammer.

"On several occasions Joe Merritt had for companion on his route a tall fellow whose law circuit took in Joe's itinerary. This six-footer became President of the United States -- Abraham Lincoln. Often Joe and my mother have talked together of the early years and I have heard Joe tell of these meetings with Mr. Lincoln."

Strangely enough, not even Joe's eldest son remembers any mention of these contacts with Lincoln. I have a feeling that his reticence was a simple challenge to comrades whose war experiences were sometimes broadcast with more of playful hyperbole than of modesty. It was never easy to get Joe started on his reminiscences, though he talked freely enough after a tactful prodding. I remember his telling me that on his way home from the fighting he had, along with thousands of other soldiers, caught a glimpse of Lincoln, but he never mentioned to me these earlier meetings. Yet I would no sooner question the statement of Mr. Moore, whom I have known since boyhood, than I would doubt the same coming from the lips of my

grandfather. Perhaps this point, like the failure of my Coles County relatives to speak of their having been neighbors to Lincoln's parents, is partly explained by the suddenness of Abe's rise from comparative obscurity to so great renown. In 1854 Lincoln was scarcely known outside of his own state.

Joe's itinerary took him through at least two of the counties comprising the old Eighth Circuit -- Piatt and Edgar. Albert J. Beveridge's Abraham Lincoln: 1809-1858* states, however, that these

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Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1928. Vol. I, pp. 513, 515, 529, 551 and 606.

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two were transferred to another district in 1853. My grandfather, therefore, did not traverse the territory officially covered by Lincoln after that date, unless he sometimes rode with the mail across the southwest corner of adjacent Champaign County, which was still one of the units of the Eighth Circuit. But Joe need not have left his territory to encounter Lincoln, who was then doing a great deal of travelling through the whole of central Illinois.

"Lincoln usually went over the circuit in his buggy, driving Old Buck, . . . often going alone over the long miles of the vast prairies." And Beveridge comments: "If Lincoln was ever happy after his breakdown in 1841, it was when riding the old Eighth Circuit. . . . 'In my opinion,' says Judge Davis, 'Mr. Lincoln was happy, as happy as he could be, when on this Circuit . . . .' The

life led by lawyers in those rural courts and at country taverns was care-free and merry. The seasons were the best for travel, and in spring and early summer the prairies were grandly beautiful. Wild flowers filled with color the waving grass which, interspersed with delightful groves, stretched into the far distance. Travellers who saw the Illinois prairies at that time wrote well-nigh ecstatic descriptions of the loveliness and magnificence of the spectacle."

My correspondent, Mr. Moore, continues: "In 1858, the year of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, these two political figures met on the hill half a mile south of Monticello and, later, at the F. E. Bryant home in Bement, where arrangements were made for the famous series of debates. Several delegations met there also. One of them, about a hundred people, from the country around Old Hermitage Inn, rode over to Monticello. Among them was Joe Merritt. Present also was my mother who, like the others, had made the trip on horseback." Joe and his neighbors must have heard several of the speeches then being made, jointly or independently, by Lincoln and his opponent. Others, too, of my Coles County relatives doubtless listened to some of these fiery speeches — that, for instance, made by Lincoln at Charleston, with Douglas there to hear the laughter Abe provoked at his expense.*

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For accounts of the Lincoln-Douglas meeting near Monticello and of the joint debate at Charleston, see Beveridge's Abraham Lincoln, Vol. II, pp. 632-4 and 672-4, respectively.

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Two of Joe's sons were later to carry Uncle Sam's mail. After the family had moved over into Piatt County, Johnnie, the eldest, while yet a boy, carried it from old Mackville over to the new town of Atwood. This was just after the building of the old I. D. & W. railroad, in the 'Seventies. During the school term, Johnnie would be excused from his class, hop on his pony, pick up the bag at Gross & Biggs's Mackville store and ride over to the L. C. Taylor store and post office at the new station. "I can remember," he says, "some of the horses I rode. There was one black fellow, with a white face. He was a wild one! We kept him in the barn most of the time, and the minute I got him outside, he'd tear across the fields like a streak of greased lightning. For a while I rode a little bay named 'Dolly Varden.' Daddy was something of a horse-trader, always swappin' horses. I even rode a mule now and then. But I could stick on anything that had hair." This trip of but two or three miles he made twice daily. In winter it was not so small a "chore" as one might think. The pay was five dollars per month. This helped Joe clothe and feed him. "I never saw a nickel of the money," the former postrider recalls. "Daddy got my pay and he kept it." Such an arrangement to a youth of the present day would savor of exploitation, but it was not extreme for those times.

Joe's youngest son also delivered the mail over a twenty-five mile route north of Atwood — the first rural carrier to be sent out from that post office. I remember very well the first

box-like little shelter on wheels in which my young uncle travelled over the dusty or muddy roads during the first years of his service. For thirty-three years, from 1902 to 1935, his daily visits continued, in all sorts of weather, among his grateful patrons.

Both he and Johnnie travelled over one short stretch of Joe's star route. In the early 1900's, Johnnie's growing family lived in the house at Atwood in which my Grandfather Samson had lived and died. A portion of its roof was sheltered under the huge branches of one of the largest elms that grew in that vicinity. One day, as my other grandfather, Joe, stood with me under that venerable tree, he said: "When I was carrying the mail between Paris and Monticello, this was a wilderness here. There were still deer to be seen in the woods where Atwood now stands. I used to ride my pony across this very ground. I know, for I remember riding many a time under this very tree."

Whatever the discomforts of his life as a mail-carrier, I fancy it suited very well a hardy spirit like Joe's. It took him away from the monotonous ring-a-ling-ting of his father's anvil, past growing villages, into warm inns and farmhouses at night, where he would enjoy the privilege, universally agreeable, of "spreading the news." To heads of families scattered along his course, to hosts of the inns he made, would be brought welcome copies of the Charleston Courier and of the three Paris weeklies, the Prairie Beacon, the Valley Blade, and the Wabash Valley Republican.* This no doubt gave him a certain feeling of grown-up-ness

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Gerhard. Pp. 439-43.

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that was one of the first things towards which a lad or youth of Joe's day bent his effort. For in those times and in such localities, one had, whether he would or not, to be the man as soon as his voice changed and the down on his cheeks began to show some resistance to razor-steel. I am sure that Joe's arrival at manhood was in no sense tardy. And romance followed him, surely, on his rides. Joe must have been rather good-looking in his youth and won, undoubtedly, a shy smile and coy waving of the hand from more than one of the youthful schoolma'ams, innkeepers' daughters, and, who knows? romantic young matrons on his route. But back at Liberty dwelt the one who, after all, embodied better than any other what was for Joe the most satisfying sort of romance — Irena Conley.

Romance had begun for them at old Liberty Church. Here Irena had seen Joe for the first time, seated on a log. "I'm going to marry that fellow some day!" she declared, to another woman present. And she did. Joe himself cannot have been at all slow in such matters. But Irena must have been, for a Conley girl and for her generation, something of an individualist. Though the women of her own family frowned on any behavior the least unfeminine, Irena's future mother-in-law seems to have coöperated. Aunt Annie Sipe relates: "Grandma Merritt would visit the Conley family. Mother (Irena) would go out in the orchard and hunt for the nicest red apple she could find and send it to Dad by Grandmother Merritt. Mother used to tell us a little story about herself. One time she

went over to her uncle's. Going through the orchard, she gathered some apples in her dress-skirt and took them into the house. When she got inside, there sat" Joe, her future husband. Having been taught modesty in the Conley home, "she let loose of her skirt and the apples rolled all over the house."

Irena was only sixteen when she became Joe's bride. Joe was not yet nineteen. They first went to live in a little log-house that Great-grandfather Merritt owned across the road from his own dwelling. Here Johnnie was born. It was not much of an edifice. It suffered the indignity of being on the same side of the road as William Merritt's barn and wagon-shed. But there was compensation for this in the fact of its being on the same side as the church — which had a steeple! — and the burying-ground. For a while Joe, the young husband, worked in his father's smithy. Later, "he got some land on the public road, nearer Charleston. There he built a little shop of his own, on the north side of the Charleston road. This was near Grandmother Conley's." His brother Sam seems to have been a better blacksmith than Joe, but the latter was somewhat in demand as a farm-hand, and Johnnie has told me how certain neighbors used to call on him to help them plant and harvest their crops. He was especially expert in the use of a scythe, being possessed of those two chief requisites of a first-class cradleman — "muscles of steel and a back of whalebone." Among those for whom Joe thus labored was Jim Rennels, brother of Irena's mother, Jane Rennels Conley.

But this pastoral beginning of Joe and Irena's life together

was now threatened by the news he carried in his mail-bag of impending strife between North and South. Soon Joe was to stable his pony for the last time. Soon was his sinewy form to sway no longer to the rhythmic movement of cradling grain or riding his post horse, but to the "Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!" of thousands of his fellows, answering the insistent, ever more ominous rumors of War!

CHAPTER XII

RUMORS OF WAR.

Beveridge* says that when Lincoln made his speech at

Abraham Lincoln. Vol. II, p. 672.

Charleston, Coles County, Illinois, on September 18th, 1858, he was "in a county where old line Whigs were thick." Like many another community in those troublous times, old Liberty had its anti-slavery citizens and its "Butternuts," in a dangerous proportion. In March, '64 — to anticipate a little — while Joe Merritt was being held a prisoner in the South, friction between the two factions in Coles County became very grave.

On the 28th, the following dispatch was sent from Springfield:

"Major-General Heintzelman:

I am informed by telegraph that the Copperheads have killed the surgeon and a private of the Fifty-fourth Ill. Infantry, and wounded the colonel and others at Charleston, Coles Co., Ill., to-day. The mayor of Mattoon telegraphs that the Copperheads are rising in Moultrie Co., adjoining Coles. I think there is reason to apprehend serious trouble unless promptly checked. The Fifty-fourth Ill. is now at Charleston. . . .

Julius White,
Brigadier-General, Volunteers."*

The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Government Printing Office, Washington, 1901) Referred to herein as "Official Records", Ser. I, Vol. XXXII, Part III, p. 178.

The official report of Lieutenant-Colonel James Oakes, dated at Mattoon, March 30th, reads:

"In affray at Charleston, on 28th, 10 killed and some 15 wounded on both sides; have some 20 prisoners here. Much excitement here, and an attack expected to rescue prisoners; reliable (reports?) state insurgents collecting in large numbers."

Oakes asked for 500 men. In response to this, Brigadier-General Henry B. Carrington, at Indianapolis, wired:

"The Forty-seventh Indiana, 560 strong, started . . . for Mattoon. Extra ammunition goes on passenger train."

On April 2nd all was reported quiet at Charlestnn and Mattoon, but the Forty-first and Fifty-fourth Illinois Volunteers were instructed to remain at Springfield and Mattoon "till after election on Thursday next. No further trouble apprehended after that."

Before and during the War, the women no less than the men, in the households in and about Liberty, took definite sides on the questions of the day. Even some of the very young women wore, as an emblem of their Southern sympathies, a pin designed after the butternut. Joe Merritt's young sister, "Frank," with the fire of the typical Merritt, once tore this symbol of secessionism from a young neighbor's dress, "stomped" it into the free-soil of Coles County, and won for herself a write-up in the Charleston paper. This little drama is not out of character with my recollection of Aunt Frank, for hers was still a militant spirit in the days when I knew her, an old woman with the scar

of a mule's kick across one eye and an erect carriage equal even to her brother Joe's on Decoration Day.

Throughout the various ramifications of our clan, there has ever been a rather remarkable scarcity of Democrats and other enemies to solid G.O.P.-ism. Not until the first Roosevelt bolted the party was there any disloyalty in our ranks to the group of which, until even more recent years, we all thought Abe Lincoln to be the pattern. Joe himself, always a stanch Republican, at that juncture followed the herd of the Bull Moose, though somewhat reluctantly, I believe, and to the great disgust of his eldest, Johnnie. And Joe, after this one sin, returned to the fold and, had he lived into the second Rooseveltian régime, would, like Johnnie, have viewed askance the activities, however conscientious, of a Democratic government. For, in spite of the fairness and hard sense characteristic both of my father and of my grandsire, any disloyalty to the party of Abraham Lincoln would be extremely difficult. And it seems but another point at which my family has been typical of the American spirit, even in its changes, that, in spite of decades of faithfulness to the Republican party, most of Johnnie's sons now discard party for the man, pointing out to their reluctant parent that, "if Abe Lincoln were alive to-day, he'd repudiate the Republicans and, if he couldn't quite embrace Franklin D. Roosevelt, would hew out a new party along not altogether dissimilar lines." But, to return to earlier politics.

However great may have been the Conley women's disapproval of the certainly more "worldly" Merritts, the two families agreed in at least one matter: both were ready, when the time came, to battle for the preservation of the Union and the liberation of the Negro. Great-grandfather William Merritt seems to have been a red-hot Abolitionist, "sound corn to the tassel," — a "mud-sill" to his pro-Southern neighbors — if one of his forefathers had owned slaves in old Tuckahoe. The road that passed his blacksmithing establishment at Liberty divided his farm into a southern and a northern half. This thoroughfare he called his Mason and Dixon's line, and when he thought the lower piece needed cultivating, he would instruct son John to hitch up the old mare that had come with them from Virginia and drive her "over into Dixie." The true line of those pre-War days was a broad belt peopled with men and women of mixed and wavering inclinations and reluctances, and though that section of Illinois in which Liberty settlement stood was in the geographical North, yet a considerable portion of its population was made up of former Kentuckians and other Southerners, many of whom found it extremely difficult to establish their convictions firmly on either side of the slavery and secession questions. But William Merritt seems to have been sure of his mind. During the War, while his sons were off to free the slaves, his business dwindled down to nothing and his shop became little more than a granary. The appropriately dramatic climax to these evil days was the burning of this shop, with "grain and a brand

new wagon" inside it, by some of his unfriendly Copperhead*

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"The term 'Copperhead,' which originated in the autumn of 1862, was used freely during the next year. It was an opprobrious epithet applied by Union men to those who adhered rigidly to the Democratic organization, strenuously opposed all the distinctive and vigorous war measures of the President and of Congress and, deeming it impossible to conquer the South, were therefore earnest advocates of peace. It might not be hardly exact to say that all who voted the Democratic ticket in 1863 were, in the parlance of the day, 'Copperheads,' but this sweeping statement would be nearer the truth than one limiting the term to those who really wished for the military success of the South and organized or joined the secret order of Knights of the Golden Circle. In the Western States, at all events, the words 'Democrat' and 'Copperhead' became, after the middle of January, 1863, practically synonymous, and the cognomen, applied as a reproach, was assumed with pride." — History of the Civil War, by James Ford Rhodes (The Macmillan Co., N. Y., 1923). Pp. 350-1.

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neighbors. This did not daunt Billy Merritt, however. He put up another establishment, where he continued to shoe his friendlier neighbors' horses. ~~— fashioning not only the shoes but, in those days, the nails as well.~~

The Merritts and the Conleys were ardently supported in their anti-slavery feelings by the Brethren Church, which, as the

Reverend H. A. Thompson has written,* "was against slavery from

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Our Bishops. Pp. 23-4.

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the beginning, and held it wrong for man to hold property in his brother man, when the national life was honey-combed with it." The Church "paper was burned by a Virginia postmaster, and her ministers mobbed because of their views." The Brethren also frowned upon membership in secret societies, a prejudice that may have had the approval of the unsociable Conleys but not of the Merritts, some at least of whom belonged to the Masonic and other orders.

Three of the Merritt boys and at least two of the Conley sons served in the Northern army. Joe Merritt's long and eventful record must have special attention, a little later. Sam and Andy Merritt also served. The latter, when not quite eighteen, ran away to Indiana to enlist. He was the smallest lad in his regiment and became known among his comrades as "Babe" Merritt. His young brother, John, was not old enough to enlist, but it is not unlikely that he, more than any of the others, was "chawmpin' the bit" to go, for John was the natural adventurer of the family, as we shall see. His mother must have sensed as much in this lad who loved to lie in front of the fireplace, poring over the book "Beyond The Mississippi," for she would implore him, every time he went into town, "Now John, don't you enlist!" If he served in "the Dog-Fennel Militia," as the

Copperheads called the Home Guard,* there would be little to

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John M. Stahl's Growing With The West. Pp. 25-6.

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comfort him in such service, and it must have galled his spirits to follow the peaceful furrow while his brothers tramped with their thousands of comrades through the rebellious South. Little wonder that, with the only tokens of war the dead arrow-points he picked up in those furrows, he scarcely waited, after Appomattox, to hear the yarns of his brothers before starting out on his own career, "beyond the Mississippi."

Great-grandfather Conley, too, must have been anti-slavery, for at least two of his sons, Jimmy and Taylor, served in the Northern army. Coming to Illinois when they did — in the 1830's — the Conleys would know from their new neighbors something of the very early difficulties there over the question of slavery, during the period 1822-1825. Frederic Austin Ogg, editor of Fordham's Narrative,* states: "The constitution framed by the (Illinois)

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P. 209.

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convention of 1818 and subsequently adopted contained a provision (Art. VI, i) which was interpreted as prohibiting the further introduction of slaves into the new state but not as liberating those already held there or abolishing slavery as an institution. These latter ends were not achieved until the second constitution was adopted in 1848" — when my Conley relatives had become

citizens of several years' residence. "The census of 1820 showed that Illinois contained 917 slaves, and that of 1830, 746."

During the War itself, the women of the two households, no less than the men, carried their full share of the burden — the mothers in anxiety for the safety of their sons, and both mothers and daughters in the labor of the two farms. And this labor, the absence of their menfolk had greatly increased. Even in years of peace the women of those days had no easy time of it. As John M. Stahl, in Growing With The West,* has expressed it,

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P. 11.

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in the vernacular of the Old Settler: "This country (Illinois) is all right for men and dogs, but it's hell for women and horses." And now, with war added, these must have seemed particularly dark and trying days to the Conley women, who not only kept the farm going but also, to increase the family income, sold their spare hours to serve in neighboring households. To what petty economies must they now give attention! Not a moment in the day but must be filled, to its full capacity, with some task or other. Was it by the discipline of those years that Aunt Annie Sipe, then a wee child, learned — from Aunt Boogo Conley, perhaps — such extensions of thrift as the boiling down of corncobs for the bit of syrup to be extracted from a pan of them? Or the diluting of Lion Brothers' Coffee until it looked like it had "swum the Ambraw"? But, under the circumstances,

there was nothing petty in such thrift. Even these details had the dignity of being "war measures." And they were being practiced throughout the nation. "Many families mixed roasted dandelion root with pure coffee while others made their morning beverage from parched corn or rye; some substituted brown for white sugar."*

*From History of the Civil War: 1861-1865, by James Ford Rhodes, ~~Rhodes's Civil War, p. 342.~~ N. Y., 1923. P. 342. Permission The Macmillan Co., publishers.

When Joe Merritt joined, from Coles County, Company E, of the Twenty-fifth Regiment, Illinois Volunteer Infantry, his first-born, Johnnie, was about four. Annie was not yet two. Upon Joe's departure, 'Reenie went with the two children to live with her parents, at the John Conley farm. Here she shared in the duties of the family and Johnnie thinks that she may also have "worked out," as her unmarried sisters did. And now her young husband, Joe, becomes the hero of our story.

Whatever future researches may reveal of the fighting propensities of earlier Merritts, Joe's record as a Northern soldier and prisoner will always seem to the author the most romantic episode in our family's simple annal. It is not at all unlikely, in view of the Merritts' assumed residence around Norfolk as early as 1700, that some of my ancestors were in the American Revolution. If, by '76, they had become back-country dwellers, then perhaps they belonged to that portion of Washington's army from

the frontiers of Virginia, known and admired, for their picturesque garb and skill with a gun, as "shirtmen" or "hairy hats." But I need not go back to forgotten, unrecorded family story for such material. For it is to be found in the lives of Joe and his contemporaries and, as we shall see, of Joe's younger brother, John, a volunteer in the dramatic Modoc Indian War of northern California and southern Oregon.*

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Our clan furnished several young soldiers during the Spanish-American War and, of course, its quota during the World War.

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Throughout the War of the Rebellion the Conleys and the Merritts were, each of them, making a bit of American history. It was destined that all their young warriors should return safely to their women, but not until all — men and women alike — had tasted fully the bitter experiences of War.

CHAPTER XIII

WAR.

I like best to remember my grandfather as I knew him during the last years of his life. I was by that time old enough to greatly enjoy his reminiscences of the War, told us on many a cold winter evening, as we sat with him around the base-burner in "Aunt" Inez's "parlor" at Atwood. Though he was never what he himself would have called "windy," neither did he, like some, adopt a posed modesty. As I here record his experiences, therefore, let me emulate my worthy old grandsire. In devoting the following pages to his story, I do not wish to exalt a forefather, or his particular regiment, but to symbolize in him other thousands — indeed, an entire race and generation.

In his later years, Grandfather often signed his letters: "Joseph W. Merritt, of Co. E, 25th Reg. of Ill. Vol. Inf., 1861-1864." The earliest mention of the Twenty-fifth Illinois that I find in the Official Records* is contained in a dispatch,

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Ser. I, Vol. III, pp. 452-3.

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dated August 23rd, 1861, from Brigadier-General U. S. Grant, at Jefferson City, Missouri, stating that "the Twenty-fifth Illinois Regiment, Colonel Coler commanding," with other troops, had reached that point, and repeating a previous statement of "the

precarious condition Lexington was in." On September 12th, 1861, Major-General J. C. Frémont inquires of Colonel "Jeff" C. Davis, at Jefferson City, "What is your effective force?" In his reply Davis includes, among others, the "Twenty-fifth Illinois, 860."*

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Ibid., Ser. I, Vol. III, pp. 171-2.

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The first major engagement at which those 860 took their perilous places was that at Pea Ridge, Arkansas.

It must have pleased Joe Merritt that his first journey as a soldier had taken him, not south, but west — across the Mississippi. He first witnessed the full horrors of war, I believe, at this battle of Pea Ridge or, as the Confederates called it, Elkhorn Tavern. This was, in 1862, in a part of the true West. But Joe could have had little leisure for meditating on his being so far west, as he witnessed the fighting on March 7th and 8th of that year. Although a number of Indians were present at this battle, it was no problem of the Indian but that of the Negro that made Missouri of that day seem so truly a part of the "wild" West. Pea Ridge ended a long period of strife of which Major-General Franz Sigel, whose command included Joe's "outfit," wrote:* "There were regiments which traversed the State

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Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: Contributions by Union and Confederate Officers, Edited by Robt. Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (The Century Co., N. Y., 1887-8). Referred to herein as "Century." Vol. I, pp. 314-37. By permission of the D. Appleton-Century Co., N. Y.

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three times in eight months, forward and backward, a distance of over 1200 miles; and this, especially during the first few months, with the most miserable outfit — without tents, without knapsacks and other accouterments, the men carrying their cartridges in their pockets and sleeping on the bare ground, braving hunger and disease." I do not know how many of these hardships Joe and his comrades suffered. But I know that he was present at Pea Ridge, which Sigel calls "the first respite gained by the almost incessant activity and the unflinching courage of our little army — the Army of the South-west. It was not a 'great' battle, like that of Gettysburg or Chattanooga; it did not 'break the backbone of the Rebellion,' but it virtually cleared the South-west of the enemy, gave peace to the people of Missouri."

And for a raw beginner like Joe, it provided plenty of bloodshed. Around the picturesque Elkhorn Tavern — the sight of which may very well have reminded him of Old Hermitage Inn, back home — were gathered 10,000 of his comrades, many Hoosiers and Suckers among them, and 16,000 of the enemy.

Sigel commanded the First and Second Divisions, the former being under the leadership of Colonel Peter J. Osterhaus, whose First Brigade consisted of the Seventeenth Missouri, the Forty-Fourth Illinois, and the Twenty-fifth Illinois. At the head of the Twenty-fifth was Colonel William N. Coler. Writing of March 6th, Sigel's report states that he met the first reenforcements, including the Twenty-fifth, at 3:30 p.m. When these had

arrived, he says, "I knew that we were safe, and left it to the Twenty-fifth (Illinois) and Second Missouri, and afterwards to Colonel Osterhaus, to take care of the rest. . . . Never troops have shown themselves worthier to defend a great cause than on this 6th of March."

Later, Captain McKenny requesting reenforcements, Sigel detached certain troops, including five companies of the Twenty-fifth. Advancing slowly to an open field, "we could easily discern the camp-fires of our friends and those of our enemies near Elkhorn Tavern."

Stating the positions of troops under his command after the fighting on the 7th, Sigel gives that of "five companies of the Twenty-fifth Illinois" as "on the right, near Elkhorn Tavern. . . In the field to the left of General Asboth and Colonel Carr, under my immediate command, were the Twenty-fifth Illinois" (apparently the remaining companies), with other units.

At daybreak of March 8th, Joe Merritt's regiment was among those assembled near Sigel's headquarters. "After the first discharges, I threw the Twenty-fifth Illinois forward to cover the space between the battery and the Keetsville road." It was ordered "to throw forward a strong force of skirmishers and take the woods in front. . . . The rattling of musketry, the volleys, the hurrahs, did prove very soon that our troops were well at work in the woods." The Twenty-fifth had done its share, he says. And now "the enemy was routed."

The report of Colonel Coler,* who commanded my grandfather's

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Official Records. Ser. I, Vol. VIII, pp. 221-4.

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immediate brigade, reads: "Early in the morning of the 8th, I was ordered to take a position in an open field, under cover of a fence and log barn, not over 900 yards from the enemy batteries." This was done "in excellent order, although to reach it we were compelled to pass through a shower of shot and shell over an open field," in full view of the Confederate guns. Arrived there, Colonel Coler "ordered the men to drop flat upon the ground, in which manner they remained for one hour and thirty minutes, exposed to a terrible fire."

This was War! On the Union side, 200 were killed, almost a thousand wounded, and 200 captured or missing. Between 800 and 1000 Confederates were killed or wounded, 200 or 300 prisoners taken.* No doubt Joe, in his next letter home, reported the

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Century. Vol. I, p. 337.

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casualties in his own regiment: of officers, 1 wounded, 1 captured or missing; of enlisted men, 3 killed, 17 wounded, and 2 missing.*

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Official Records. Ser. I, Vol. VIII, p. 204.

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On May 9th, Joe and his "buddies" were ordered "to Brigadier-General J. C. Davis, U. S. Vols., Sulphur Rock," in northeastern Arkansas.* By May 17th they had "moved by forced marches to Cape

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Official Records. Ser. I, Vol. XIII, p. 374.

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Girardeau," Missouri. Two days earlier, the Union soldiers under Halleck had reached within four miles of Corinth, Mississippi. By May 30th Corinth had been evacuated. By July 31st, '62, Joe and "the boys" had become a part of the District of West Tennessee, Major U. S. Grant commanding. The Twenty-fifth itself was under Major Richard H. Nodine.*

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Official Records. Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Part II, pp. 144-79

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Joe now found himself in the true South. (He was not only making history, but learning geography as well.) Having experienced the rigors of camp life in Missouri and Arkansas in March, he was now finding out how hot the South could be in midsummer. The next direct reference I find to the Twenty-fifth Illinois is contained in the official report* of "August 4-7, 1862,

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Official Records. Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Part I, pp. 28-9.

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Reconnaissance from Jacinto to Bay Springs, Mississippi, and skirmish," which states that this little group of Union soldiers bivouacked at 1 a.m. hoping to reach the enemy by daylight, but "the infantry was so exhausted by the previous night's march that it was impossible." Fired upon by the Confederate pickets, the Union commander of the party "immediately deployed two companies of the Twenty-fifth Illinois Volunteers as skirmishers and scoured the brush until the pickets were discovered. . . . My officers and men behaved admirably. Without murmur they stood

the fatigues, but were intensely disgusted when they found the enemy were retreating."

Of the 54,000 Union soldiers assembled to oppose the 15,000 Confederates at or about Perryville, Kentucky, on October 7th and 8th, 1862, it is said that perhaps not over one-half were actually engaged.* Among those who definitely were, we find the

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Century. Vol. III, pp. 29-30.

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Twenty-fifth Illinois, under Lieutenant-Colonel James S. McClelland.* One of the dramatic features of this battle, known

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Official Records. Ser. I, Vol. XVI, Part I, pp, 1033-6, and Part II, p. 591.

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also as the battle of Chaplin Hills, was the fight of the boys from the North for water, found only in shallow pools in the drying creeks about Perryville. The command of Major-General Charles C. Gilbert, including the Twenty-fifth Illinois, reached one of these, which flowed between the contending armies, on the evening of October 7th. "An incident," wrote Major J. Montgomery Wright, "will illustrate the scarcity of water.... My careless announcement that I was about to take a tin-dipper bath brought General Buell out of his tent with a rather mandatory suggestion that I pour the water back into my canteen. On the morning of October 9th that water helped to relieve the suffering of some wounded men who lay between the two armies."*

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Century. Vol. III, pp. 52-61.

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At sunset on the 7th, Joe and his fellows of the Twenty-fifth, no doubt weary and dirty like the rest, "were thrown out as pickets upon the left and front." But, though engaged, Joe's brigade, in the words of Brigadier-General Robert B. Mitchell,*

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Official Records. Ser. I, Vol. XVI, Part I, pp. 1076-9.

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"did not have the opportunity to gratify the desire for a chance at the enemy that their looks, language, and action showed they possessed." There were no casualties in the Twenty-fifth. But this did not mean they missed any of the tragedy of war, for after the battle of the 8th almost 4000 dead and wounded comrades lay about them. The Confederate forces had lost over 3000.*

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Century. Vol. III, pp. 29-30.

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Doctor's Creek must have flowed almost as much with human blood as with its scant, polluted water.

Colonel David Urquhart,* a member of the staff of the

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Century. Vol. III, pp. 600-609.

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Confederate General Bragg, after relating how the sound of distant guns at Perryville cut short, at Frankfort, the inaugural address of the secessionist governor, says of the battle: "There was desperate fighting on both sides. . . . The battle of Perryville, a hard-fought fight against many odds, was merely a favorable incident which decided nothing. Our army, however, was elated and did not dream of a retreat" -- until it found itself

ordered to make one.

By the end of December, 1862, Joe and the Twenty-fifth found themselves back in Tennessee. Though so far south, the weather at Murfreesboro', on Stone's River, was bitterly cold. The opposing forces, in number, were about equal. From December 31st to January 2nd of the new year, they witnessed and participated in one of the most fiercely contested and bloody conflicts of the war. Colonel Thomas D. Williams, who led the Twenty-fifth, was killed, his place being taken by Captain Wesford Taggart. In killed alone, the Union army lost 1700, the Confederate 1300. In the brigade in which the Twenty-fifth served, 32 died during the campaign. Joe's experiences as a prisoner of war might easily have begun here instead of at Chickamauga, for after Stone's River no less than 3700 Union men were found captured or missing.* With such losses,

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Century. Vol. III, pp. 610-13.

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it must have seemed to the soldiers of either side a horrible disaster. Such it must have appeared to the fellows in blue until, on January 3rd, 1863, Bragg began his retreat. Major-General Thomas L. Crittenden, who commanded the Union left wing, in reviewing Stone's River,* wrote: "The battle was fought for the

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Century. Vol. III, pp. 632-4.

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possession of middle Tennessee. We went down to drive the Confederates out of Murfreesboro', and we drove them out. They went off a few miles and camped again. And we, although we were the

victors, virtually went into hospital for six months before we could march after them again. Whether we would take Murfreesboro' or go back to Nashville was doubtful until the last moment. As in most of our battles, very meager fruits resulted to either side from such partial victories as were for the most part won. Yet it was a triumph. It showed that in the long run the big purse and the big battalions — both on our side — must win; and it proved that there were no better soldiers than ours."

On June 25th, 1863, the Twenty-fifth Illinois bivouacked near Hoover's Gap, to the southeast of Murfreesboro'. "June 26, reached Manchester pike, near Hoover's Gap, with the entire (Third) brigade. . . . July 3rd, to Winchester. The march, one of unusual hardship and fatigue, with almost constant rain and mud." Colonel Heg reports "no casualties," but the capture of 16 prisoners.*

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Official Records. Ser. I, Vol. XXIII, Part I, p. 482.

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On August 26th, 1863, the Northern "Jeff" Davis's First Division, including the Twenty-fifth Illinois, were breaking up camp on Big Crow Creek, near Stevenson, in northeastern Alabama. On that date Colonel Hans C. Heg was ordered to move forward the Third Brigade "as an escort to the pontoon train intended to establish a bridge across the Tennessee River at Caperton's Ferry."* After three strenuous weeks of marching and climbing,

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Official Records. Ser. I, Vol. XXX, Part I, pp. 496-502.

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Joe's regiment reached a point near Rosecrans's Chickamauga headquarters at 11:30 a.m. on September 19th.

Here, at Joe's last battle, he was to see war at its most dramatic, and also its most horrible, best — or worst. Lieutenant-General Daniel H. Hill, of the Southern army, wrote of it:*

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Century. Vol. III, pp. 658-62.

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"I have never seen the Federal dead lie so thickly on the ground, save at Fredericksburg." Though the Union forces were obliged to retreat to Chattanooga, it was a "barren victory" for the Confederacy, he declares. "The élan of the Southern soldier was never seen after Chickamauga." The man who, more than any other, lowered that élan at Chickamauga, was General George H. Thomas, whom my grandfather and many another veteran in after years affectionately called "old Pap Thomas."

Of the participation of the Twenty-fifth in this stupendous battle, a quite definite record is to be found in Davis's report, here somewhat condensed:*

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Official Records. Ser. I, Vol. XXX, Part I, pp. 496-502.

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"Heg's brigade was at once ordered to advance. The action commenced about 12:30 p.m., and was sustained with great stubbornness on both sides for a half or three-quarters of an hour, when Heg reported his left very hard pressed. I ordered Carlin's reserve regiment to his support. This distinguished regiment

engaged with great spirit in the contest, then of doubtful issue. I was enabled to repel the enemy until about 4 p.m., when reenforcements arrived. Fresh troops being placed, my command was relieved from further participation in this part of the engagement, and ordered into bivouac back of the field they had held for so many hours against almost overwhelming odds, over one-third of their number having fallen, killed or wounded, among whom was the gallant leader of the Third Brigade, Colonel Heg. Darkness was bringing a close to the contest of the 19th, and I ordered my troops to stack arms, get refreshments, and replenish their exhausted cartridge boxes."

Colonel John A. Martin was now placed in command of Heg's brigade. Martin's report* for the 19th, before Heg fell, reads:

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Official Records. Ser. I, Vol. XXX, Part I, pp. 528-31.

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"Reaching Rosecrans's headquarters, the brigade formed into line of battle, the Fifteenth Wisconsin, the Eighth Kansas, and the Thirty-fifth Illinois being in line, and the Twenty-fifth Illinois a reserve directly in their rear. The enemy, in the timber, behind fallen logs, opened fire. We replied with effect and pushed forward vigorously. The roar of musketry was deafening. The Twenty-fifth Illinois, ordered forward, came gallantly into line. The stream of wounded to the rear was almost unparalleled. Still the brigade held its ground, cheered on by the gallant Heg, who was everywhere present, careless of danger. The

enemy, constantly re-enforced, poured a destructive fire down our line. We had then held the ground three-quarters of an hour. Colonel Heg gave the order to fall back, and the men slowly retreated behind the trees, firing at the advancing enemy, stubbornly contesting every inch. Again and again they advanced and fell back. Almost half of the brigade was killed or wounded, Colonel Heg mortelly. But the remnants, falling back to a fence, held the enemy until re-enforcements came, when, crossing an open field, they reformed in the edge of a forest, behind a log barricade. Again advancing across the field, they took their old position behind the fence, remaining here until nearly dusk. Our ammunition now exhausted, we moved back to the woods, At dark we were withdrawn by General Davis, to bivouac near the battlefield."

Martin says that by far the larger number of men were lost the first day -- September 19th. The History of Piatt County (Illinois), by Emma C. Piatt,* states that my grandfather "was

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Shepard & Johnston, Chicago, 1883(?). ~~P. 445.~~

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taken prisoner at the battle of Chickamauga, September 20, 1863." In view of the great losses on the 19th, he may, in fact, have become a prisoner on the earlier date. In any case, let us see what was the fate of his comrades. Martin continues: "On the second day we had hardly 600 men left in the brigade. These were opposed by a full division of the enemy. The list shows the loss to be fully 60 per cent. of those engaged."

Joe's Twenty-fifth was led into battle by Major Samuel D. Wall. The latter being wounded, Captain Wesford Taggart was placed in command.* Ten of the enlisted men in the regiment met

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Official Records. Ser. I, Vol. XXX, Part I, pp. 40-3.

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death at Chickamauga.* From Rosecrans's great host, after the

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Official Records. Ser. I, Vol. XXX, Part I, pp. 171-4, 502, and 531.

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battle, no less than 4774 were missing or captured.*

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Century. Vol. III, pp. 672-6.

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Among the latter, was Joe.

CHAPTER XIV

A PRISONER OF WAR.

To a newspaper correspondent,* Joe Merritt once said:

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See the Decatur (Ill.) Review, q. Feb. 25, 1922.

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"I was held captive, along with a host of other Union prisoners, after our capture at Chickamauga, in the prison at Richmond, Virginia." Joe was doing some travelling! Here he was, in his native state — not far from the site of his birth, in the "Shannador" Valley — the fortunes of war having taken him as far into the Southwest as Arkansas, across the South, and now almost to the Atlantic seaboard. But it was no tour de luxe to be seized ~~upon~~ at Chickamauga by Johnny Reb and, after a long journey, cast into Libby Prison at Richmond. Conditions at Libby, he said, "were fairly decent." After a sojourn there, he was moved to Danville, Virginia, near the Carolina border. Later, he was shipped still further south — almost to the Gulf, indeed — to notorious Andersonville, in Georgia. Conditions at this latter place were "terrible. The food was insufficient and coarse, consisting largely of corn-bread, usually more than half raw. Men died like sheep. I was chosen to apportion out food for a hundred men and it was a task to see that each got his share, unpalatable as it was."

Just as, one notes, veterans of the World War seldom relate the most terrible of their experiences, so did my grandfather seldom recall his stay at Andersonville. Yet that must have been by far the most horrible episode of his entire life. If one would know just how harrowing an ordeal it was for the 40,000 prisoners who passed through its gates — 23 per cent of them never to come out alive — let him read The Tragedy of Andersonville,* an authentic and unbiased account of the trial of

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Published by the author, Sacramento, Calif., 1911.

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Captain Henry Wirz, the prison keeper, written by General H. P. Chipman, Judge Advocate of the Military Court that found Wirz guilty of "murder, in violation of the laws and customs of war," and sentenced him to hang for his criminal mismanagement of the Rebel charnel house. Following my grandfather's example, let me state as briefly as possible a few undeniable facts about this prison.

In fairness to the South, one has to recognize that this corral for human baings was, first of all, one of the emergencies of war. It was a natural product of war, so that culpability for the conditions that existed within the crude stockade lies, in the first place, with war itself. In the second place, in justice even to such evil personalities as Wirz and his associates, it must be admitted that much of the suffering and mortality might have been prevented but for the neglect of the Confederate government itself. So much for the blame. Now for conditions.

It was terribly overcrowded. There were times when the area per man was less than 34 square feet.* Thousands were sick and

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Chipman. P. 84.

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dying, many of them from a diarrhea that made one swampy portion of the enclosure a vile morass of human excrement. Shelter there was none, except that obtained by a few resourceful ones who burrowed into the ground or devised some poor canopy of any available material. This in a dreadfully hot country, in midsummer. As there was practically no other discipline than the watchful guarding of the "dead line" by Wirz and his henchmen, there prevailed all degrees of criminality, from murder down, among the starving prisoners themselves.

I believe it was at Andersonville that my grandfather witnessed a lynching which he related to me, I think just once. Some of the prisoners, still desperately hungry after receiving their meager bit of unwholesome food, had stolen a little more from their comrades. This so enraged the others that they unceremoniously hanged the thieves, I have forgotten just how many of them. Grandfather made the statement: "I witnessed the lynching," and added, very gravely, "but I had no part in it."*

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I remember his also assuring me that he had nothing to do with the lynching of one of his Piatt County neighbors, guilty of wife-murder, though he "knew who did it." I think he was Justice of the Peace at that time. At any rate, he had no aspirations to become Judge Lynch.

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This affair at Andersonville may have been that mentioned by a witness in General Chipman's book:* "In July (1864), the Federal

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Pp. 66, 85, and 194-5.

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prisoners tried, condemned, and hanged six of their own number, who had been convicted of stealing and of robbing and murdering their fellow-prisoners. They were all hung upon the same day, and thousands of the prisoners gathered around to witness the execution. The Confederate authorities are said not to have interfered." This is borne out by the testimony of the Reverend Peter Whelan: "There was a court-martial of the prisoners held on these men and six of them were condemned. They were put in the stocks. I visited them the evening before they were hanged and gave them all the consolations of religion that it was possible for me to do. The next morning Captain Wirz came down to carry them to the stockade to be delivered to the prisoners there. I asked him to delay their execution for another day. He said to me that it was out of his power. . . . They were brought in by Captain Wirz with a company of soldiers. . . . Captain Wirz said something like this: 'Boys, I have taken these men out and now I return them to you, having taken good care of them. I now commit them to you. You can do with them as you see fit.' Then turning around to the condemned men he said, 'May the Lord have mercy on your souls.' The men were then placed on a platform or gallows. They begged of me to make an appeal to their comrades — an appeal to spare them

from execution. I made it to their fellow-prisoners. There was a hollow square formed with the six men and myself inside of it. One of them broke loose. He said he would not ascend the scaffold, and he broke through the line and ran into the swamp. A number of men followed and brought him back. They were his fellow-prisoners. After the men were hanged they were cut down and buried. They carried them outside the stockade and buried them in a separate part of the graveyard, I believe."

One portion of the evidence submitted at the Wirz trial reads:*

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Chipman. Pp. 89-90.

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"The sick within the stockade were under several long sheds, . . . open on all sides. They lay upon the bare boards, or upon such ragged blankets as they possessed, without bedding or even straw. Pits for the reception of feces were dug within a few feet of the lower floor, and they were almost never unoccupied by those suffering with diarrhea. The haggard, distressed countenances of these living skeletons, crying for medical aid and food, and the ghastly corpses, with their glazed eyeballs staring up into vacant space, with the flies swarming down their open and grinning mouths, and over their ragged clothes, infested with numerous lice, formed a picture of helpless, hopeless misery which it would be impossible to portray by words or by the brush." These things my grandfather saw — as here described, not by a prejudiced victim, but by a Confederate surgeon. Little wonder that

he once said, "All things considered, I didn't enjoy prison life very much."

The threat of Sherman's march to the sea "caused the Southern government, fearing that Andersonville might be attacked, to scatter the prisoners in smaller groups over the South. Well, when they decided to move us, I was sent with a small group to be confined at Florence, South Carolina. When we disembarked from the box-car in which we were transported, the small number of guards had their hands full in quieting the men, who were restless and inclined to bolt," especially as they found the stockade there not completed. "Directly across the track was a patch of timber. I decided that if I could make that timber without being shot, none of the few guards could be spared to hunt me down. I watched my opportunity and made a break for the woods. Not a shot was fired at me and I do not know whether they even saw me or not, for the guards were busy corralling the men. It was broad daylight. When I hit the woods, I kept going on and on until the timber got more open, then I decided to hide until night and continue under cover of darkness. I found two logs and hid beneath them. I had been there only a short time when I heard a rustling. I thought, 'Well, they decided to send someone for me, after all.' Then I saw that it was another Yank. I signalled to him and found that he, too, had escaped. We held a consultation and decided to strike north for Newbern, North Carolina, for we knew that city was held by the Northern army. For seventeen nights we travelled,

resting in the daytime, getting most of our food from the Negroes, who helped us when we made ourselves known. We had several narrow escapes. One night we came to the Big Peedee River. We could find no place to cross and it was too wide to swim. Finally we constructed a crude raft out of driftwood, tied the sections together with grapevines, placed our clothes on top of it, and swam across, holding to the raft and pushing it before us. We made it, but it was a ticklish proposition."

Joe and his comrade, by the time they had reached the opposite shore, must have felt somewhat as one of Sherman's men did while making a similarly difficult journey north through the Peedee region. "One day," as Sherman related the incident, "while my men were wading a river which was surrounded for miles by swamps on each side, after they had been in the water for about an hour without much prospect of reaching the other side, one of them cried out to his chum, 'Say, Tommy, I'm blowed if I don't believe we've struck this river lengthways!'"* Joe Merritt must

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Quoted in Rhodes's Civil War, p. 422, from Horace Porter's version in the Century Magazine, Sept., 1897. Used by permission of The Macmillan Co. and the D. Appleton-Century Co.

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have been an excellent swimmer. When he was past seventy, while watching a young member of his household, a lad of eleven or twelve, swim in the creek near Atwood, he discovered that the boy was having difficulty with the strong current. At last, seeing that the swimmer was in great danger, the doughty septuagenarian jumped into the water and saved his young companion's life.

"Eventually," Joe's narrative continues, "we struck a railroad and resolved to proceed along it. Of a sudden, one night, we ran upon an armed guard seated in front of a bridge. We were on him before he saw us, as he evidently was asleep. He called to us. We knew military procedure, of course, so we decided to bluff it. It was pitch dark and he could not distinguish us. We 'bawled him out' for failing to observe military law in halting us. He waved us on and we passed close to him but I do not think he even rose from his sitting posture. We dashed into the woods just as soon as we had crossed the bridge, although we did not think he suspected us. But somehow, in a case like that, distance lends enchantment.

"The Negroes furnished us food on the way. They would journey back and forth from one plantation to another during the night and we would lay in wait for one of them, tell our story, and hide until he returned with what food he could get together. They almost always came back with what they could spare.

"One night, as we were trudging silently along, we suddenly heard voices and decided that Rebels had placed guards at the crossroads. We could not learn whether they were merely guarding the road or had a string of pickets stretched across the country. So we lay flat and waited and waited. Presently we heard horses, footsteps. We heard the mounted party say, when challenged, 'We have come to relieve the guard.' The newcomers did not spread out over the countryside, so we knew that the

road alone was guarded. We circled them and forged ahead. We had had a long wait but we were taking no chances when our lives and liberty were at stake.

"On the seventeenth day we came upon the macadamized pike outside of Newbern. There were no people to be found on the road, however, and we did not know whether the Yanks or the Rebels held the country. We did not travel on the pike, but proceeded parallel to it, coming down onto the road now and then for a lookout. Then we came upon fresh horse tracks, and on examination we found the tin-foil from some 'fine-cut' tobacco. Then we were sure that there were Yanks in the vicinity, for the Rebels never used that kind. We were still cautious and proceeded parallel to the road until we saw figures on horseback coming. We hid ourselves on the roadside and watched their approach. One moment we thought they were Yanks, the next moment we were sure they were the enemy. It was the tensest moment of my life. At last, we saw they were Union soldiers and we started toward them. They placed their hands on their pistols and rode toward us. About fifty feet away, however, they saw what we were, and they yelled, 'Come on, boys!' They jumped off their horses and put us on them and took us back to the camp, outside the city, where their detachment was guarding the road.

"Afterward we were taken into Newbern. The city was in the throes of yellow-fever and people were dying by hundreds. The next day, as luck would have it, we got on a boat that was

going to New York and, after fifteen days of quarantine, were allowed to enter. We had managed to get along out in hostile territory but New York just about did us up and I felt mighty helpless. We had a hard time getting transportation back home but eventually we got there. I came to Charleston, in Coles County, where I was then living.

"My 'buddy' through this adventure was William Hozier, of Dayton, Ohio. We separated and I did not hear of him for years and years. Meanwhile, I had moved to Atwood, in Piatt County. One day, after we were both old men, Hozier wrote a letter to Charleston, asking the postmaster to locate me. I was informed of his address and wrote. He announced that he was coming to see me at once. He came out and we went over the past together. I guess that's about all there was to it."

How I regret having missed the wonderful talks those two must have had, reviewing their adventure after almost half a century!

Grandfather used often to say that, though he went through the War without a scratch, he just missed coming home in his coffin. While he was taking this, his only journey by sea — up past Norfolk, home of his fathers — he met with an accident in which he barely escaped death: while lying on deck with some of his comrades, a heavy door of some sort fell and injured him quite seriously. I think it was of this misfortune that he was thinking when he said that New York "just about did him up and he felt mighty helpless."

There was, however, compensation for this roundabout, almost disastrous home-coming: in New York, or possibly in Washington, he was one of the thousands of weary, homesick soldiers who enjoyed the blessed privilege of looking at the worn figure and into the harassed face of the noblest of all Americans — Abraham Lincoln, before whom, I believe, they passed in review. Did Joe, I wonder, as he passed this tall, lanky rail-splitter from Illinois, have something like this to say to the fellows marching at his side: "Why, that fellow don't look any more like the President of the United States than I do! He even looks like me. Hey there, boys, don't you think I look like Abe Lincoln?" And to some particular comrade: "That's the kind o' men we raise in Illinoiz. Long-legged and raw-boned, like the corn. He growed up in Sangamo', two counties over from Coles, where I come from. His pa and ma had a cabin just across the county from my folks. The Ambraw woods is full o' men like him. But there's only one Abe Lincoln! When I was carryin' the mail, before the War, I used to meet that fellow, ridin' his law circuit. And now he's President of the United States. Well, anyhow, I'm a corp'ral!"

Piatt's brief biography of Joe relates that by the time ~~Joe~~ he arrived home from the War "the folks had given him up for dead." Although I have never heard it corroborated by any of my relatives, I am inclined to believe that the family may indeed have had no communication with its young soldier through this later period, especially as Piatt's account has the appearance of having come

from an interview with Joe himself. On this point, Joe's eldest daughter, Annie, writes: "Mother heard from Daddy until he was captured. She had sent him pictures of Johnnie and myself. I know by this that he had written her, as I have often heard her tell of sending the pictures, and of his losing them in the following way. Once, during the fighting, he was standing by a tree when another soldier came running by and fell to the ground, shot by the enemy. He asked Daddy to tie up his wounds with an old dirty handkerchief, which he tore into strips. Daddy stooped to help the man, laid down his haversack, which contained the pictures, and forgot to pick it up again."

Another biographical sketch states that this period of captivity, when Joe's family, apparently, did not know whether he was dead or alive, lasted "about a year." Seventy years later, his son, Johnnie, would remember that his father "used to say he served in the army three years, three months and — I forget how many days." His closest "shave" during that long period was when, pausing a moment one day during the fighting, to watch the drama going on about him, a bullet struck the buckle of his belt, dented it, but glanced off without harm to the wearer.

Home again from the War, Joe started out one day on a ride to Charleston with a friend, and again encountered misfortune. His horse, in some way, fell with him, and he suffered a broken leg. He was carried to the house of a neighbor, whence a doctor was sent for, and here Joe was obliged to lie on the flat of

his back until he could be removed to his own little cabin. Here, no doubt, he was visited by Merritts, Conleys, and others, many of them just home, like himself, from the fighting. Among these would be Cousin Baker, who had been at Chickamauga with Joe. And Cousin Burd Fitzpatrick, another comrade, who would not fail to narrate an incident of their joint sojourn in the South. Joe, though no temperance man, was no great consumer of liquor. This made it easy for a Fitzpatrick to play a good joke on his Merritt cousin. When, at a certain encampment, they had been issued peaches in a sort of liquor, it was no trick at all for Burd to persuade Joe to take his fill of the perfectly harmless fruit, while he, Burd, consumed the more potent juice. But the effect was quite other than Joe had expected: his Fitzpatrick kinsman was completely sobered up before the peaches had finished fermenting in the naïf Joe's interiors. This affair provided so good a tale for those days of practical joking that Joe's eldest still relates it, after almost three-quarters of a century.

Though not garrulous about his wartime adventures, Grandfather never lost interest in the story of the Rebellion, and continued through the years to read of his nation's defeats and victories. He was a picturesque unit of the thinning line that marched behind the flag each Memorial Day. He continued very patriotic and studied with great feeling the progress of the World War, in which he was proud to have his grandsons bear arms. He even wrote to the Governor of Illinois, offering, when

he was almost eighty, to serve his country in any way possible to him at that age!

For some time after his return, little Johnnie and Annie were to sit shyly on his knee and call him "Joe," just as their elders had when they spoke of him during his absence. And no doubt his resumption of duties as head of a family of four gave them so little opportunity to know him intimately that they thought of him as in no way different from their uncles, Sam and Andy Merritt, and Taylor and Jimmy Conley, all just returned, like him, from freeing the slaves -- and whippin' the devil out of the Butternuts! I suppose Joe found it such a chore just to feed a wife and two children, in post-War times, that he had little leisure to <u>know</u> them. In addition to the labor of procuring food -- chiefly from the seven acres on which his shop stood -- and raiment for this little group, Joe now took upon himself the task of providing them a new house. This consisted of "a large room, with shed-kitchen, and a big fireplace." But they were scarcely settled here before there began, in front of the new hearth, fresh talk of yet another trip "up West."

CHAPTER XV

WESTWARD.

When Joe Merritt and his contemporaries, soon after the War, began talking of another jaunt westward, the womenfolk no doubt felt very much as did "Uncle" Joe Cannon's mother, who, at that family's departure from North Carolina, is said to have prayed: "Good-by, God, we're going to Indiana." But Joe Merritt and other males, by a trick of punctuation, would, like Senator Jim Watson, echo: "Good, by God, we're going to . . . " — Kansas.

For, to Joe Merritt and many of his generation, the West was Kansas. Everyone, just then, seemed to be either going to Kansas, with hopes high, or returning thence, with his pipe out. Joe Merritt was not one to miss any of the fun. Kansas or bust! His generation must do its portion of the race's westward shift. To any feminine objection, Joe might have argued that the Merritt chickens had not rolled over on their backs, to have their feet tied for the next move, half so frequently as had some of their neighbors' poultry. Why, the Merritts were slow: it had taken them a century and three-quarters, more or less, to travel from Norfolk, Virginia, to Coles County, Illinois. Look at the folks who had gone by ox-team from Maine to the California gold-fields, in an uninterrupted journey! I wager that all hell could not have kept Joe from joining that roistering, gold-seeking band, had he been twenty instead of

ten when Marshall made his great discovery. Nor Joe's brother, John, who did join the later Argonauts, in the 'Seventies. Well, Kansas was on the way to the Pacific!

But before we start out with Joe on what proved to be an abortive trip to Kansas, let us follow his brothers, Andy and John, and others of his Coles County neighbors. It was soon after the War, I think, that Andy married Nancy Harriet Rennels, niece of Jane Rennels Conley. Nancy Harriet was the daughter of Thomas Rennels and Susan Stone.

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*See Addenda C.

The Stone family must have been one of Coles County's earliest. Susan Stone's grandfather, John Stone, was a Carolinian. Two, at least, of his sons, John and Jeremiah, had gone to Indiana. A third, Stephen, settled ~~near the Merritts~~ in Coles County. Here, on two main travelled roads, in a brick dwelling known as the Five Mile House, he conducted a wayside inn. "Stephen Stone was born in 1794. He was a farmer and a veterinarian — a sociable, jovial man, with many friends. He was Justice of the Peace for many years. . . . A neighbor, Michael Coon, and his wife contracted cholera during an epidemic and Stephen Stone nursed them until they died, then buried them. He was a Universalist. He married Nancy Bowøn. Nancy's sister, Peggy Bowøn, married John Goodman. Their eldest, Thomas Goodman, was well known in Illinois as a Christian minister. Another son, Doctor William Goodman, a botanic physician, had a reputation there as a doctor. William Goodman got the gold fever in 1849 and started

to California, but died on the plains with cholera. Stephen and Nancy (Bowen) Stone had ten children."

One of these, William, married Armilda, daughter of John Rennels. Before "Uncle Bill Stone died, he sent for a carpenter, named McMorris, to take his measure for a coffin. McMorris brought the coffin for Uncle Bill to inspect. He looked it over and asked the carpenter to push it under the bed, as he would need it soon. He had ordered it made of walnut, of which there was plenty in the country." Plenty for every pioneer need, from the homemade cradle to the crudely fashioned casket.

William Stone's brother, Napoleon, married Mary A. Connely. "Uncle Poley was a farmer, Justice of the Peace, and in early life a school teacher. During the Indian depredations in northern Texas," to which some of the Rennelses and Stones had gone, "he served as a Ranger."

Another brother, John, went, not into the Southwest, but to the true Far West. "John Stone married Permelia Durham White, daughter of Asa White and Mary Lewis, the latter a cousin of Major Levi Todd, killed at Blue Licks, Kentucky." They were distant kinsmen of Mrs. Lincoln. John Stone died at Walla Walla, Washington, and is buried in the little cemetery where Marcus Whitman and other victims of the Indian massacre lie.

Doctor Stephen C. Stone, ~~now-nearing-ninety~~ nonagenarian, son of John and Permelia Stone, in a manuscript <u>Narrative of the John Stone Family Crossing the Plains in 1863</u>, has given an interesting

account of that journey, from which I quote.

"My father owned a farm five miles southeast of Charleston, Illinois, across from the Five Mile House. Father's health not being very good, he and mother, during the winter of 1862-63, often talked of emigrating to California the next spring. Jackson Cartwright, a neighbor, had made the trip in 1849. Cartwright encouraged father to sell our farm and move to California, as he wished to move there also. Two other families, by the name of Beasley and Boly, wanted to go as far as Colorado. Father sold his farm to James Waltrip and began making all necessary arrangements for the trip. He rigged up two wagons, with two yoke of oxen to each. Oxen, we were informed, stood the trip better than horses and mules and, besides, the Indians would steal horses or mules much quicker than oxen. . . . May 7th, 1863, was the day set for starting. Our relatives, friends, and neighbors gathered to bid us good-bye. Grandmother, Nancy Bowen Stone, was to accompany us, though she was then past seventy.

"Our route led us through Charleston, Mattoon, Springfield, Beardstown, and Carthage, Illinois. As we passed through the latter, we saw the jail in the wall of which a mob had torn a large hole and shot Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, and his brother, Hyrum. This had occurred in June, 1844, but the scar on the wall was still there. Nauvoo was not far away. We were soon at the Mississippi and crossed, on a steam ferry, over to Keokuk, Iowa. Travelling along the Iowa-Missouri line, we arrived at Council

Bluffs. As we rode through Iowa, we found quite a few of the towns and villages almost deserted, owing to the Civil War. The country was mostly prairie, and we would look ahead of us and see what appeared to be a nice town. But on arriving, we would find only a few men, maybe two or three, the residents having become alarmed at the spread of the War, and skipped.

"Reaching the Missouri, we crossed on a steam ferry to Omaha. Here we noticed several large corrals of big covered freight wagons, those of Mormons sent out from Salt Lake City for goods, Omaha being the nearest shipping point. In forming these corrals, they would drive half of the train in a circle to the right and the other half to the left, the ends leaving a space of twelve or fifteen feet through which to drive the stock into the corral. This space they would close with log-chains. The ends of the wagons would be drawn up close together, forming a strong wall that the stock could not very well escape from. The freight wagon would be large, high, and covered, and to it would be hitched from fifteen to twenty yoke of oxen, and to the big wagon would be attached one or two trail wagons. Almost every day, from Omaha to Salt Lake, we met these long freight trains. When we camped at night we corralled our own wagons in the same way. As we came along, west of Omaha, we noticed on either side of the road the skeletons of many buffalo, oxen, and elk, bleached as white as marble. On these some traveller had often written his name, address, and destination, and sometimes added a verse.

"After leaving Omaha, for forty or fifty miles, we now and

then saw a farmhouse, generally of sod. But soon there were no more to be seen. All our lives we had been used to seeing farmhouses, with the smoke curling out from the big chimneys, but now we saw them no more. We strained our eyes for some indication of civilization but saw none. Occasionally we saw a few Indians and, away out on the hills, herds of running buffalo, looking like low, dark clouds moving along. At night we heard the hideous howling of prairie wolves. The first Indians we saw were the Pawnees. Some of them lived in sod houses during the winter but in summer in wigwams. I believe the Sioux were more like the buffalo — going south in winter and, when spring came, working north where the grass was greener. We had no trouble, but a few times it looked as if we might have a spat with them.

"A few miles out of Omaha, we joined a larger train and became a village-on-wheels of about forty families. These called a meeting, to elect a captain and a sergeant of the guard. Then night came, the roll of names was read and those who were to go on guard took charge of the stock. About one o'clock in the night these were relieved by others. In the night the stock would lie down to rest and then the guards could get together and sit and chat for an hour or two. But cattle are somewhat like people: some are nervous and fidgety, and with the stock this would nearly always be an old bell cow which must get up and feed, and the tinkle of her bell would arouse the whole herd.

This meant the guards must be up and doing. Many of the horses wore iron hobbles. These were so made that it was quite a puzzle to put them on and take them off. An Indian could not remove them, and white men had to be shown how. A horse with hobbles was not easily stolen, but the hobble was quite a hindrance to the horse, which had to lift both feet at the same time and step forward with the hind feet only. Some would use a rope and iron picket driven into the ground. This would give the horse a circle of a hundred feet to feed in, but he often got tangled in the rope and burned his legs about the hocks until they were almost blistered. This was slow in healing.

"We soon came to the Platte River, which is shallow but wide, full of islands, and the water very roily — full of fine sand. To use it we had to dip up a bucketful and let it stand until the sand settled. Some were quite careless and, drinking this, got diarrhea, which often led to typhoid or what was called 'mountain fever.' Along the Platte we boys noticed that some of the cottonwood or balm trees had rings cut around them until they could hardly stand, and many had fallen. At first we thought the Indians had done it, but we soon found that a wise little animal, the beaver, had done the cutting and falling of the trees, to build his house in the water. He usually managed to fall the tree into the river.

"Ours was called a 'mixed train' — of horses, mules, and oxen. Soon after leaving Omaha, horse and mule trains would catch up with us and go by on the trot. In a few weeks we would overtake

them and pass them by, their teams having got thin and jaded down and many of them lame. Along the Platte we often saw depressions in the earth about a foot deep and eight or ten feet across — buffalo wallows. These contained a few inches of water, which was often a strong solution of salt, borax, and sal soda, as red as lye. When we unyoked our oxen at camp, if we did not watch them they would drink this strong alkali water, which was sure death to them. If we drove them to fresh water first and let them fill up, they would not drink enough of the alkali to hurt them. I remember well our losing a very valuable ox in that way, before we had learned how dangerous it was. The captain of the train would usually ride on ahead and look out for the dangerous places in the road, bad hills, and suitable camp grounds. Sometimes he would ride back and meet the train, sometimes wait until it came up, then we would hear: 'Captain, have you found a good camp ground? Plenty of wood, water, and grass?'

"For many days at a time we would have no wood to burn in our sheet-iron stoves and so would have to burn buffalo chips — the dried fecal matter of the buffalo, which would burn quite readily and make a hot fire. Many times I have seen men and boys out gathering up great armfuls and women gathering apronfuls of these. In some places there was a kind of willow that grew in the low ground, and when the prairie fire came along in the fall it would scorch them just enough to kill them. Then, when emigrants came along the next season, they could use them as fuel. We would grasp all that our hands could span, give them a few

wiggles, and the willows would break off at the ground. They made a hot fire but did not last long. We bound them into bundles, tied them on behind our wagon-boxes, and hauled them sometimes for days at a time to use at camps where there was no fuel or where we arrived after dark.

"I believe we averaged twelve or fifteen miles a day on the trip. When we got to Fort Laramie, we camped across the river from the fort. While we boys were playing, we discovered a dead Indian, up in the branches of a tree. He had been wrapped in a buffalo robe and lashed to the limbs with a lariat made of buffalo skins. We scampered away in great confusion, as we were not only afraid of the dead brave but were afraid that the live Indians would take it as an affront and shoot us. At two different Government forts, Bridger and another, all the men and boys were lined up for an oath of allegiance to the United States.

"After many long weeks, we came to the famous city of Salt Lake and were directed to camp in what was called Union Square. Nearby was a feed corral where we bought feed for our stock. We had hardly got our teams unhitched before dozens of Mormon women, with baskets full of vegetables, were trying to sell them to our people. They would trade for any kind of tinware. They would take even a tin can and have it made up into some useful utensil. Many of the Mormon women were dissatisfied and sought an opportunity to get away. A few made arrangements with some families in our train to secrete themselves in the wagons the evening before we

left the city and in that way escape. In this they succeeded. . . .

"From the Sinks of the Humboldt, we drove ten miles or more and came to what was then known as Truckee Desert. The weather was very hot and we thought it best to drive through as much of the desert as we could during the night. The first part was a kind of chalk bed and our wagons rolled over it very easily. There was no vegetation but scattered sand-thistles or nettles. We drove all night on this chalk bed and arrived at Hot Springs, which I believe were called Steamboat Springs, about daylight. The water was very hot, but we managed to find some pools where it had cooled, so that our stock could drink a little of it. After driving a short distance, our road led up a small sand hill and for five long miles we drove through coarse sand in which our wagon wheels sank down from four to six inches, making a dead pull for our teams, which were about fagged out. The sand was so hot that our little dog, Penny, would run from one bunch of sand-nettles to the shade of another and yelp every jump. After travelling through this, we drove down a slight incline to a mountain stream which was the most beautiful sight, it seemed to me, that I had ever beheld. We were all afraid to drink more than a sip of water at first, so we washed our faces and bathed our heads and hands and cautiously drank the water until we were back to our normal condition. We were afraid that large drafts of water would make us sick and with some it did. This stream was called Truckee River and was right out of the

snow banks of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

"After resting up a few days, we drove up the Truckee a few miles to Truckee Meadows, in which there were a few settlers. The city of Reno is now located there. We then drove up the eastern slope of the mountains, until we arrived at the summit. This required three or four days. We met hundreds of large freight teams coming over from the Sacramento Valley, with freight for the Carson and Washoe mines, just then being developed. They were mostly horse and mule teams, with from four to six spans to each wagon and its trail or trails. Almost every team had bells, like sleigh-bells, on the hames of each horse. These were attached to a metal bow that arched over from the top of each hame to the top of its mate, standing up a foot or more. Those teams, when in motion, looked fine! Each wagon had a chock-block attached to a chain in such a way that in going up a steep hill, if the driver wished to rest his team, this chock-block would prevent the wagon from running back down.

"Every few miles, through those mountains, we came to large taverns at the side of the road. They were made of hewed logs, chinked and dobbed with lime mortar. They were well made and looked fine. Each tavern seemed to have a saloon, well patronized. The timber here was pine and sugar-pine, and grew very tall, with little underbrush. After we reached the summit, it took us about two days to get down to the Sacramento Valley. In going down, we passed through many small mining villages, among them, I remember, one called Yuba Dam. Our next point was Marysville, on the Feather River. When we arrived, we found it quite

a busy town. There were hundreds of large freight teams there, as it was one of the nearest shipping points for over the mountains into Nevada. We crossed the river at Marysville to Yuba City, a small village, and then drove down below town and camped close to the river, in a stubble-field, September 9th, 1863. There was plenty of feed for our stock and an abundance of melons and fruits of all kinds, especially peaches.

"We remained in camp a few days and then father rented a farm, eighteen miles above Marysville, from a George Lynch. This concluded our long and tiresome journey from Illinois to California. Our train, organized a few miles out of Omaha, had stayed together but a few weeks and then split up into smaller trains. Some liked to travel a little faster, some slower. Some observed the Sabbath. Others wished to lay by a day and do their laundry Monday mornings. When a train was large it included all the professions: preachers, doctors, lawyers, carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, and fiddlers. Some would be engaged in family worship, some arguing politics or religion. Or a fiddler might be entertaining a crowd of young folks, all sitting around on the grass. Some were sick, some very sick, and I remember one funeral. At one time we came very near losing mother, sick with cholera morbus. At Truckee Meadows we ran out of flour and father gave a man twenty dollars for a hundred-pound sack and thought he was very lucky to get it for that price.

"I drove two yoke of oxen, hitched to a thimble skein Schuttler wagon, from Illinois to California, and never missed a day on

the entire trip, at the age of sixteen. One yoke of oxen were muleys, a red and a black. The weather was warm and we had trouble with the wagon tires and spokes. To tighten a tire, we would get a strip of thin wood and back it all around the felly, then heat the tire in a circular fire, and put it on again. For loose spokes we would wrap old sacks or pieces of cloth in and out, back and forth, between the spokes, close to the hubs, and keep these wet. The feet of the oxen wore thin, so that they could hardly get along. Then they would have to be thrown and tied, and sole-leather shoes screwed on. Some, not many, had iron shoes.

"I believe that a little hardship in youth does the man good. It is bad medicine to take but one learns from it many important lessons. He learns the dimensions of a dollar. He learns to respect the rights of others.

"In closing, I wish to say that I would hate very much to make the trip again under like circumstances. It has now been fifty-seven years* since we made the journey and I have forgot-

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*This was written c. 1920. ~~Dr. Stone, still living in Salem, Ore., is now (1936) nearing ninety.~~

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ten many incidents. But it is well to forget some things."

A decade or so after this Stone group had reached the Pacific coast, a related one went into the Southwest. Susan Stone,

sister of the California party's leader, had married Thomas Rennels, son of John and Nancy Rennels. Thomas and Susan's daughter, Nancy Harriet, had married Andy Merritt, who now — in the 'Seventies — "headed for Texas."

Andy Merritt, though the "Babs" of his Indiana regiment during the War, had in him the stuff needed for pioneering in Texas. One of his sons relates: "Father was once accused by a big bully of stealing some grub from his comrades. The accuser himself was the thief, but he put the blame on Father who was the smallest fellow in the regiment. Father proved his honesty and his courage by giving the big lout a good lickin'. Mother used to tell how Father had kept one of his comrades from deserting. The poor fellow got panicky during a battle, threw down his gun, and was about to run when Father, who was a little runt along side of him, persuaded him to pick up his weapon and face the enemy. Father was wounded in the ankle and carried a cane, made of bois d'arc, until his death."

Andy's adventures did not end with the War. He made two trips from Illinois to Texas, settling after the second in Wise County. Also to Wise County had gone the family of Carlo Ball. ~~A companion on this journey was Carlo Ball. Reaching~~ Reaching Texas, the two families settled in the same community, Ball to run a grist-mill, Andy to continue the traditional trade of his people, blacksmithing. They found Texas still a wild country. Soon after their arrival, the settlement was raided by a band of Indians and two of the Ball children were captured and spent

a year or more as prisoners, their release being finally arranged by the surrender to the hostiles of a number of horses. "The Indians," Andy's son relates, "also attacked a family by the name of Huff. The family was all killed but one of the boys, Matt, whom I knew, as an old man. He had been scalped alive. After he grew up, he went to the State Fair once and, seeing a band of Indians, recognized the very same buck that had scalped him. And they had to lock old man Huff up till the Indians was out of town, to keep him from killing the fellow who had helped massacre his folks."

During the remaining years of Andy Merritt's brief life, he taught country school, his duties including the direction of the local "singin' school" -- the Merritt talent for music serving him here.

Andy's progeny are now scattered between Texas and California. Of the eldest I am told: "Emma married twice, the second time a widower. Like Aunt 'Frank' Harshbarger's, her household had three sets of children. When Emma's flock got obstreperous, she used to say to her husband: 'Mr. Spencer, will you go in there and speak to <u>your</u> children, <u>my</u> children, and <u>our</u> children.'"

Oliver Wendell Holmes once wrote: "Every man is an omnibus in which his ancestors ride." The truth of this was revealed to me on my first meeting with one of Andy Merritt's sons. My own family had lost track almost completely of the Texas branch, with whom there had been no intercourse since the 1870's, until

*Footnote, over

Footnote to:

. . . ancestors ride."*

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*From Holmes's The Guardian Angel. Used by permission of Houghton Mifflin Co., publishers of Holmes's works.

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Andy's Joe recently visited us. In spite of the fact that my own people are still Middle Westerners, living in California, and that Joe is a true Texan, his resemblance to the typical Merritt of Illinois was uncanny. This, despite the fact that one had to go back, for a common denominator, to Great-grandfather William Merritt, and to Virginia, where Andy and his brother Joe were born, in the 1830-40's.

A few years before the Andy Merritts moved to Texas, his eldest brother, Joe, had started for Kansas. It was to be quite a party. Joe's sister, Frances — "Frank"—, had married her cousin, Jeff Fitzpatrick, who now joined Cousin Joe in the adventure into Kansas. And there was to be still another Fitzpatrick among them — Rachel Ann (née Fitzpatrick) Merritt, aunt to Jeff, and mother to Joe and Frank. For Rachel Ann it was to be only a bit of travelling, for the sake of her health. Great-grandmother Merritt had been ailing for some time. A tall woman, she had now grown thin, and it was feared that, like many another pioneer mother, she had become the victim of tuberculosis. A change of climate might help her. William, her husband, a little too weary to join them, I suppose, after so many years of farming and blacksmithing, was to remain at Liberty. His wife would make the trip with her son and daughter, and return as soon as an improvement in health permitted.

Joe's Johnnie remembers the preparations: "Daddy got him a new Bain wagon, put strong brakes on it, and made a prairie-schooner top out of heavy canvas. The tar-pot hung from one of

the axles. We had no axle-grease in them days. Everybody made his own, out of lard and — flour, I think."

Of all those left behind in Coles County, none felt more keenly the departure of Joe's little Johnnie and Annie than did Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Sar'Ann Conley. More than sixty years after their leave-taking, Annie wrote: "I remember how Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Booge cried. In those days Kansas seemed at the other end of the earth. Johnnie and me was about ten and eight, I think. A picture of John shows him about that old. Aunt Booge made the suit he wore to the photographer's. . . . So we all said good-by. We made slow progress. The roads was terrible. I don't know how long we travelled, but I do remember when we arrived at Mackville, or Lickskillet, as some called it. After we had had our supper, Dad and Jeff went over to Gross's store, where all the men of the village loafed. They asked Dad where he was from, what was his trade. He told them, and they informed him they needed a Blacksmith there. The nearest one was at Tuscola, ten miles east. So Dad came back, telling Mother they wanted a Blacksmith. They talked it over and decided to stop. He rented a little house and we all lived together for a while until Dad bought a place of his own, built a little home, and went to work."

Mackville is <u>not</u> in Kansas, but Illinois — in Piatt County, the second northwest of Coles! The Merritt chickens must have been bewildered at having their feet untied after a journey of but thirty or forty miles. In <u>A Tour Through Indiana in 1840</u>, the

diarist, John Parsons,* tells of an old Hoosier pioneer who "stopped

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A Tour Through Indiana in 1840: The Diary of John Parsons of Petersburg, Virginia, Edited by Kate Milner Rabb (Robert M. McBride & Co., N. Y., 1920). P. 96.

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at Greensburg perforce because his horse dropped dead at this place, and liking it well, he has here remained." The well-shod horses of the Merritts and Fitzpatricks did not drop dead, surely, at the end of a two or three days' journey, but an incident similarly whimsical had something to do with the settling of our party there and their subsequent residence in the vicinity for almost three-quarters of a century. (~~Two~~ One of Joe's "boys" still dwells there.)

Aunt Annie's account of their arrival contains an error: Mackville did then have a blacksmith. But it is not strange if the citizenry of the town ignored his very existence, for he seems to have been obscure as a blacksmith and as a village drunk notorious. He was in his cups at the time. Joe — who, though no teetotaler, drank little — made an offer for his business and bad name, and the deal was closed. If Blank had not been drunk and in a mood to shake the dust — or mud — of Lickskillet from his feet, the Merritts might have driven on to the scene of Carrie Nation's labors.

Great-grandmother, finding the vaporous banks of Lake Fork little different from those of the Ambraw, went back to the latter and to her husband's hearth. She was destined, however, to return

to Mackville and to die there. Though she continued in delicate health, she lived for several years, to laugh many times, no doubt, over her "trip to Kansas."

There was many a laugh, too, for the Merritts and their neighbors in a trip Joe made in the 1880's, I believe. Though it took him as far west as Denver and must have been an interesting journey to the eager Squire, it was made under rather humorous auspices. Let Joe's Johnnie tell the story. "Up around Bement and Monticello was a family Daddy knew. Old Simon was a retired farmer — pretty well to do. After he got up in years, he took a notion he wanted to go out West on a big hunt. I guess he had come to Illinois in the days when game was plentiful and now he wanted to go out and kill buffalo, I s'pose. So, to humor the old fellow, his folks made arrangements for a trip and hired Daddy as a kind of bodyguard. They bought an outfit — the latest model in rifles, and everything to go with it. I guess 'Uncle' Simon thought he was goin' to kill everything from grizzly down. So him and Daddy took the train to Denver. They put in two or three weeks there, seein' the sights, but not killin' many buffalo. That was as far west as Daddy ever got."

A few years earlier, Joe's younger brother, John, was making the journey that was to give him the distinction of being the first of us Merritts to see Pacific shores. John's early life in the West started with romance. Returning to Coles County from a first trip beyond the Mississippi, he called on a boyhood sweetheart, whom he hoped to take with him on his next. But he was to

suffer the disappointment of learning that the young woman, only a few days earlier, I believe, had become the wife of another. And so John again became the wanderer.

Great-uncle John I never knew until we had all come to California. By that time he was a picturesque, lovable old fellow, who lived quite alone on his little grain and chicken ranch near Butte City, in the Sacramento Valley. From there he came once or twice to visit us in Oakland, entertaining us with quiet accounts of his early years in the West, when he had been almost completely out of touch with Illinois relatives. Shortly before my grandfather's death, he visited Joe in Illinois. Without preliminary correspondence, he entered the little office of Atwood's Justice of the Peace. (No doubt he found Joe asleep, feet resting on his desk, as I have so many times discovered him. From those siestas I, as a boy, would not have awakened my grandparent for all the world. Cousin Bonnie Mumper felt no such fears. She would rouse him with a kiss on his bald head, ask him for a penny, and then extract all the small coins he had from the leather pouch in which he carried such notarial fees as he collected.)

Enter John, after an absence of several decades, the Merritt twinkle in his eyes.

"Morning, sir. Do you know anybody around here by the name of Joe Merritt?"

"Yes, sir. I'm Joe Merritt."

"Well, I'm Joe's brother, John."

Uncle John used to tell us of his early years in California, of his sallies to wild and wicked Frisco, where, like his grandfather at Richmond, Virginia, he spent his savings on the fleshpots of a tidewater city. He told us also of other pioneers whom he had known, among them, John Bidwell. Another, Captain Oliver C. Applegate, whose father, Lindsay Applegate, had been an early voortrekker into Oregon, still remembers, at the age of ninety, young John Merritt, as a volunteer in Company B, Oregon Mounted Militia, which Applegate led, in the early 'Seventies, against the Modoc Indians of Oregon and California. It is to that story that we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER XVI

THE INDIAN "GOES WEST."

No truly American family can have travelled long down the decades of our nation's history, or far across its geographical breadth, without some contact with the only true American — the Indian. The one account I have of my clan's earliest remembered encounter with the red man is contained in the following brief paragraph from a letter written by a kinsman, Mr. E. M. Sampson, of Abingdon, Illinois, whose grandfather was a brother to my great-grandfather, Ephraim Samson: "The Sampsons came from England. Settled in New York and Virginia. My grandfather was Benjamin, grandmother Martha. They were cousins. Grandmother's mother was a Sampson. Her maiden name was Charles. Their parents were murdered by the Indians. Grandfather and grandmother, the only ones to escape, went to Lexington, Kentucky. Came to Paris, Jennings County, Indiana." Here Ephraim, of my line, was living in 1826, probably earlier. He was then grown, his son, James, being born there ~~about that time~~ in that year. Where Ephraim was, to escape the fate of his elders, I do not know. Perhaps he had gone on ahead to Indiana, whither the others were bound when the Indians attacked and killed all but his brother and cousin. My mother recalls no tradition bearing on this episode. Future search may reveal something more.

Most of the Indians of Illinois, by the time of the Merritts',

if not of the Conleys', arrival there, had "gone West" — either literally or figuratively. By the time Jim Rennels had put up his log-cabin in 1833, Black Hawk had made his tragic statement to the Sauk, that the palefaces were "running their ploughs through our graveyards, turning up the bones and ashes of our sacred dead."

The following, from the Tuscola (Ill.) Journal of June 29th, 1933, refers to the Indians who had dwelt on the very stretch of the Embarrass River later so familiar to my Illinois relatives: "The skeleton of a man, presumably an Indian, was found in the Kelly gravel pit southeast of Charleston on Saturday afternoon by Robert Craig of that city. It was in a sitting position on the east side of a hill, facing east, with the head dropped over the chest. When assembled, with the aid of Dr. Martin Bisson, it appeared to be the skeleton of an unusually large man of about twenty-five. It was estimated that it had been buried for about seventy-five years, possibly more. The teeth were in perfect condition. Finding of the skeleton recalled to mind an Indian battle that took place between the whites and the Indians along the Embarrass river near this spot in the early days. Tradition has it that the Indians were chased down the river through what is now The Rocks Park, and it is believed that this Indian might have met his death in that battle. There are known to be some Indian burial grounds several miles south of Charleston, and two years ago a skull and a shin bone were found in a gravel pit on the A. J. Daily farm, about five miles southeast of the Kelly

pit, by Charles Milliner. No ornaments of any kind were found on the body (discovered in the Kelly pit)."

My mother remembers the poor Indians she used to see selling their curios at the railway station in Decatur, Illinois — in the 'Sixties and 'Seventies, I suppose. Grandfather Samson used to bring pieces of their beadwork home to her. I, as a boy, often found arrowheads in the fields west of Atwood, after each plowing. We children felt sure that these marked a former battleground in the low field between the village and the creek. I remember, also, two or three semicircular mounds, of no great size, at Gross's Woods, on the east bank of Lake Fork, midway between the Mackville and railroad bridges. I still long to explore these, in the hope that they may be true Indian mounds. I believe they were partially covered over when the stream was dredged, about 1905. I shall always remember, too, a lecture I attended as a child, in the old Methodist Church at Atwood, by an Indian, dressed in his war-feathers, and assisted by his "squaw." Few things in later life impressed me as did his blood-curdling songs and war-cries. But, until we moved west, no more personal association with the Indian came to us Merritts of later generations than attendance at the "Kickapoo Indian Sagwa" medicine-show that performed each summer, under spluttering, odorous torches, on the main street at Atwood.

But to one earlier relative, John William Merritt — who had found such romance in the pages of Beyond The Mississippi,

and whose youth had cheated him out of the romance of soldiering with his brothers in the South -- to John Merritt came, in the 'Seventies, real adventure with the Indians. Of this, the Modoc War, and Great-uncle John's part in it, I shall write at some length, especially as no cross-section of American life and history would be complete without one chapter at least of the vanquishment of the aboriginal American by his Anglo-Saxon successor. Of that long and bloody struggle, moreover, the Modoc War was typical. So, also, no doubt, were the services of my uncle, as a volunteer.

In the early 1850's, about the time that the lad John Merritt was adventuring with his kin into the Mississippi Valley, a young Modoc Indian boy of about his own age was attending a council of his elders somewhere near the Oregon-California boundary. When this boy's father, chief of the Modocs, was himself a child, the life of these "Moatokni maklaks" must have been quite

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"People of the south." They were so called with reference to their relatives, the Klamaths, who dwelt just north of them. See "The Material Culture of the Klamath Lake and Modoc Indians of Northeastern California and Southern Oregon," by S. A. Barrett, in University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, Vol. V, No. 4 (The University Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1907-10).

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free of any unhappy crossing of their trail with that of the

whites. Even the fourteen year old son, Jack, may have remembered more peaceful years when, with no fear of the whites, he accompanied his parents on excursions southward to Lost River and Tule Lake in search of wild swans, geese, and ducks, and of salmon and trout, caught in dip-nets from dugout canoes. In those more tranquil years, their only dreaded enemy in that direction would be, perhaps, the mountain-lion, with which they liked to play at deadly hide-and-seek in the Lava Beds, south of Tule Lake. This Southland was their particular heritage. For trouble, for adventurous tests of their superiority over other nations, they needed only to travel northward, towards the Rogue River and Crater Lake. In the evil waters of the latter, no young Modoc or Klamath warrior ever swam except to defy the sinister spirits ruling there. But to the south lay a pastoral land -- a land so beneficent that they would never give it up, to white man or red, without brave struggle. And now this traditional hunting-ground was being invaded, not by their red enemies, the Rogue River Indians and the Modocs' none too friendly cousins, the Klamaths, but by pale strangers out of the East.

At a council in 1853, young "Captain Jack," in spite of his youth, had the temerity to oppose the will of his father, the chief, that all white trespassers upon their land should be killed without mercy. "I am a Modoc," the boy declared, to his surprised elders. "I am not afraid to die. But we have not killed any white people yet, and let us not kill any. The whites who killed our

tribesmen did so thinking that we had killed some of their people. The Pit River Indians killed them. Let us tell the white people so. If we love our country, let us not fight the white man." By 1872, when bloody conflict with the new race of men coming into their country had become inevitable, Captain Jack had grown to manhood and was now the rather remarkable leader of one group of his people, just as his contemporary, Sitting Bull, had become the truly great leader of the Sioux.

As that year drew to a close, the Modocs found themselves between the devil and the deep blue sea! They must either abandon their former free life on Tule Lake, and become, with quarrelsome Klamaths, "agency Indians" on the colder Klamath Reservation, or they must play the rôle of hunted coyotes, with the almost impregnable caves of the California Lava Beds as their lair. Again like Sitting Bull, Captain Jack, admirably thoughtful of his people, chose the latter course only in desperation. When his white neighbor and friend, Judge Steele of Yreka, spoke to him of the futility of resistance, Jack answered: "Kill with bullets no hurt much; starve to death hurt heap!"

Another remarkable Modoc — a woman — was Jack's cousin, Winema ("Tobey") Riddle, wife of Frank Riddle, a young Kentuckian who in 1850 had joined the immigration to the Pacific Coast.*

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Their son, Jeff C. Riddle, is the author of The Indian History of the Modoc War (Copyright, Jeff C. Riddle, 1914), from which the present writer has obtained much of his material for these pages. Jeff Riddle is still living at Beatty, Klamath Co., Ore.

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On November 17th, 1872, this capable woman made a ride of seventy-five miles to deliver to her tribesmen and their chief this message, spoken in tears: "The soldiers will be here to-morrow. Do not resist them. Go back to the agency. Go to Yainax where the other Modocs are. If you fight, all of you will be killed." To this, Jack answered, "I will not fight if the soldiers do not force me. If they do, I will die fighting like a man." But bloodshed was now unavoidable. At the close of November, there occurred a clash of soldiers and citizens with Jack's band, on Lost River. Conflicting are the white and red accounts: some of the former declare Jack a coward; Riddle's book shows him making a supreme gesture to diplomacy by ordering his men to disarm themselves. To me, he seems no coward and something of a diplomat, doing his utmost to serve his people. As usual, the white man's industry — in this case, cattle-raising — was a factor in the difficulties. Indeed, these Anglo-Saxon roots of the evil become so obvious to the investigator that at times they almost take on the nature of a wrangle between the states of California and Oregon. Yet, though not all the deep-seated causes lay in the direction of the Indian, still the massacre of settlers that now took place was real and horrible.

The Modocs fled to "the Land of Burnt Out Fires," as Brady*

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Northwestern Fights and Fighters, by Cyrus Townsend Brady (The McClure Co., N. Y., 1907), Pp. 227-325.

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calls that volcanic waste-land, the Lava Beds, "an immense plain

of volcanic rock, cut and broken with fissures, canyons, and chasms*." Bancroft states that some of these great gashes in the

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*Report of Governor Grover to General Schofield on the Modoc War, and Reports of Maj. Gen. John F. Miller and General John E. Ross, To the Governor (Mart. V. Brown, State Printer, Salem, Ore., 1874. In the Bancroft Library, Univ. of Calif.).

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Lava Beds were a hundred feet deep and as many wide. Here and there, among rocks "of every conceivable size, from a pebble to a cathedral," were "level flats of a few acres covered with grasses, and furnished with water in abundance, where the Indian horses grazed in security*." During the dry months, however, and in Jack's

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*History of Oregon, by Hubert Howe Bancroft (The History Co., San Francisco, 1886-8). Vol. II, pp. 555-636.

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immediate stronghold, water was not so plentiful. In fact, its scarcity became an important factor in his final retreat and surrender. Nevertheless, their nearness to Tule Lake enabled the young braves, on at least one occasion, to issue from their fortress, "stripped to the buff," and enjoy a swim before the very eyes of the surprised soldiers*. Here, then, by virtue of this almost

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*"It would have been hard to starve the Modocs out of the Lava Beds. All they had to do was to sneak out, steal some cattle, and cache the meat in one of the natural ice-caves. I've seen ice in these on

the Fourth of July. We made ice-cream with it. . . . The Indians usually got a dirty deal. I know. I was a mule-skinner with Custer in '73. I went to the Modoc country soon afterwards." — John Connolly, in talks with the writer.

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perfect stronghold, the Modocs succeeded, in spite of their small number, in putting up one of the bravest fights in all the brave annals of the red man. On January 17th, 1873, a real battle was fought. It lasted throughout the day and brought death or wounds to about forty soldiers and volunteers. And the "coyotes"? Riddle says: "The chief called his men together at the war-dance. Not one was missing."

There followed negotiations between Captain Jack's band and a peace commission composed of General E. R. S. Canby, Alfred B. Meacham, L. S. Dyar, and the Reverend Eleazer Thomas, Winema acting as interpreter. During these efforts at peace, there developed dissension among Jack's own followers. At last one group proposed that at their next council with the whites, the treacherous murder of the commissioners be resorted to as the only hope of escape from capture. Here the character of Captain Jack was brought out and expressed in ardent, typically Indian oratory, before his restless followers: "This is not fair, my men! Why do you want to force me to do a coward's act?" He refused to sanction the commissioners' death. Then the enemies in his own household employed that infallible device for raising the fighting spirit of any

Indian: they called him "Squaw!" To this the virile leader did not reply quite in the manner recorded of many similar instances, i.e., by showing his privates, but he did answer in no uncertain statement: "I will kill Canby. It will cost me my life, the lives of my people. It is a coward's work. But I will do it."

In spite of a warning from Winema -- who, notwithstanding the difficulty of her dual situation, proved herself a true diplomat -- the commissioners insisted on still another council. It ended in the deaths of Canby and Thomas. Dyar and Meacham escaped, the latter aided by the faithful "Tobey," at the risk of her own life. In fairness, one is obliged to record here that, a few years earlier, forty-one red guests at a white man's feast and council were killed by the same sort of betrayal. General Canby's death occurred on April 11th, 1873. For a few days longer, Jack's doomed little army did its last bit of fighting in and around the Lava Beds, from which they finally fled "right under the noses of the soldiers." They had proved themselves no squaws. (One wonders at this disdain of women, which often seems more an affectation than a reality. Many of the squaws fought side by side with sons and husbands.)

On June 1st, 1873, Captain Jack of that sorry little nation, the Modocs, found himself in the very jaws of a trap that the soldiers had at last set for him, with the help of some of his own former comrades. When his pursuers had chased him "down on Lost River about the upper end of Langell's Valley, Oregon, they

saw Captain Jack running for all that was in him, with Hooker Jim and two soldiers in pursuit. Scarface Charley reined his horse in ahead of Jack and told him to stop. Jack was out of wind. He fell to the ground and wept like a child. Finally he got up and told the soldiers he was ready to die." Such is the Indian account. Brady gives another, quite as pathetic, by Brig.-General David Perry, who found Jack and his family secreted in a cave, their presence having been revealed by the appearance of an Indian dog and an arm lifted to snatch it out of sight. "I told my scouts to ask Jack if he would surrender. He replied that he would, and requested time to put on a clean shirt." Another officer, Major J. C. Trimble, wrote: "They had with them the infant daughter of the chief, by whose tiny footprints the trailers made sure of their game." He was tried and convicted of "murder in violation of the laws of war" — whatever that may mean.

Bancroft relates that after the death of the commissioners, Jack had made an attack on one of the camps, dressed in the uniform of General Canby! But at his trial there was little in his appearance "to indicate the military genius that was there. He was rather small, weighing about 145 pounds, with small hands and feet, and thin arms. His face was round, and his forehead low and square. His expression was serious, almost morose, his eyes black, sharp, and watchful, indicating cunning, caution, and a determined will. His age was thirty-six, and he looked even younger. Clad in soiled cavalry pantaloons and dark calico shirt, his bushy, unkempt

hair cut square across his forehead, reclining negligently on his elbow on the ground, with a pipe between his teeth, from which smoke was seldom seen to issue, his face motionless but for the darting of his watchful eyes, he looked almost like any other savage."

Invited to speak, Riddle says, Jack "rises with some hesitation, first casting his eyes on the chain on his legs. He then mutters: 'I cannot talk dressed in these irons. My days are gone. When I was a boy I had it in my heart to be a friend to the white people. I was a friend to them until a few months ago. What was it that turned my heart? My own people. I am not afraid to die, but I am ashamed to die with my hands tied behind me. Although I killed Canby, I see no crime in my heart. I was forced to do it. You whites drove me from mountain to mountain, like a wounded deer. . . . I see in your faces you are tired of listening to me. I hope you will not ill treat my young boys and girls, on my account. . . . Has a white man ever been punished for killing a Modoc? No. But I am on the edge of my grave. One of your white men killed <u>fifty</u> of my people, my father among them. In a few days I will be no more. I now bid the world farewell. I am ready to go to my Great Father in the Spirit Land.'"

Jack met death bravely — October 3rd, 1873. He and three others "were hanged in full view of their own women and children. A wail of anguish rose, in which even the stoical Klamaths joined." And, as at least Riddle records, some enterprising gentleman disinterred the lifeless form of this splendid primitive spirit and

exhibited it in the East to curious morons at ten cents per empty head. So closes the heroic story of Modoc Jack — Keiintoposes — and his "fifty-two warriors that held one thousand troops, seventy-eight Warm Spring Indian Scouts, and one company of Oregon Volunteers at bay from November 18, 1872, to June 1, 1873." Bancroft sums up: on the side of the army, including settlers and all whites (with Indian allies), there were 65 killed, 63 wounded, of whom some died. "Thus the actual loss of the army was at least equal to the loss of the Modocs, leaving out the wounded; and the number of white persons killed more than double." The war had cost over half a million dollars. And, as Major Trimble asks, "for what? To drive a couple of hundred miserable aborigines from a desolate natural shelter in the wilderness, that a few thriving cattle-men might ranch their wild steers in a scope of isolated country, the dimensions of some several reasonable-sized counties."

No more ironic symbol of the tragic fate of the American Indian is to be found than a certain book that lies in the library of the Iliff School of Theology, at Denver, Colorado. This volume, published in 1752, a compendium of Christian institutions, is bound in "the skin of an Indian who was killed after a desperate struggle by General Morgan, proprietor at that time of what is now Morgantown, West Virginia." But we accomplish nothing, at this late date, by moralizing over these matters. Justice to red or white can lie only in an attitude like that of the old Greek dramas, in which there is ever present the element of the ineluctableness of our human conflicts. Of our mortal subjection to

the will of the gods, a perfect instance is to be found in the circumstance that Modoc Jack, who, like all Indians, was no doubt an affectionate father, had his last hiding-place revealed to the enemy by the tiny moccasin-prints of his baby daughter! Since, however, it is beyond our powers as men to maintain this high, amoral viewpoint, since we must weigh all things in terms of "right and wrong," let us at least rise to an understanding of the respective psychologies of these two opposed races. This, at last, is being done by such writers as Stanley Vestal, authority on the Sioux, and some of his contemporaries, who are, for example, penetrating the psychology of Indian warfare, and who are beginning to comprehend a quality in the Indian's soul that we, of our day, might well recover for ourselves: the love of Home. It is recorded that, when certain old Indian warriors of the South were being removed from their ancestral home to strange lands west of the Mississippi, they trudged through familiar woods, affectionately touching the trees in a terribly felt farewell. General Sherman once telegraphed his representative in the Modoc campaign that, if peaceful measures failed, Jack's band ought to be so completely wiped off the earth that there should be no need of any other reservation for them than "graves among their chosen lava-beds." Even in uttering this, Sherman probably failed to grasp how imperative to the Indian was the urge to lay down his dead body where already rested the dust of his fathers.

The not too sympathetic chronicler of Bancroft's chapter on the Modoc War unwittingly reveals subconscious fairness hidden

under surface prejudices when she says that Jack's behavior had "appeared more like the obstinacy of a spoiled child than the resolution of a desperate man." It really was — what I have put in italic. The same writer adds, hastily, "If the truth must be told, in point of natural sagacity, diplomatic ability, genius, this savage was more than a match for them all." Bancroft's version has Jack making money by the prostitution of his women and calls him "the prince of liars." He was actually, no doubt, like the rest of us, neither saint nor devil. His followers were the same. One of them, after doing his utmost to slay as many whites as possible, on discovering two former cowboy friends among them, risked his own life to save that of these two tribal enemies.

CHAPTER XVII

JOHN MERRITT ALMOST "TRAPS A SQUAW."

I wonder if Uncle John Merritt was not transporting supplies to some sheep outfit in the vicinity of Tule (Rhett) Lake when the Modocs went definitely on the rampage, during the closing weeks of 1872. Shortly before his death, Great-uncle John said to the writer: "I had come to California in 1871. Wages on the ranches was pretty low. And some of the jobs was not easy. I worked eleven hours a day, some places. I spent some time as a woodsman in the Sierras near Redding, fellin' trees. Never worked in the mills. We slept out of doors except in midwinter, when we put up tents. I had an offer to superintend the movements of some sheep to Nevada at forty dollars a month. That seemed pretty good money to me. I followed this two years. I wasn't a herder. I kept the herders and their men in provisions. I had to do a lot o' ridin'. Had a horse for myself, pack animals, and a wagon to haul grub in. I took these as far as possible into the mountain grazing lands. I always had a couple o' sheep dogs with me, too, for use when the others got lame or needed a rest. The dogs had 'shifts' like the men. Them dogs was pretty smart. Whenever I went near the flocks with my two reserves, they wouldn't offer to round up the sheep, though they might have been doin' that very thing only the day before. I had some good dogs later, on my Butte City ranch. Used 'em to chase wild fowl out of the

grain fields. California was still pretty wild in the 'Seventies. I never saw any bear. Wasn't lookin' for any. Saw lots o' deer. And wild fowl. I killed a swan just lately. It's against the law, but I figured it was flyin' too high for my marksmanship. I surprised myself. He was a big fellow, bigger than a goose. I got a good steak from the breast. And it was good eatin'!

"It was a rule o' the land in the old days that anything a fellow found in the woods was his if he needed it. If a man discovered a stranger eatin' his bacon, he only inquired if he had got enough. Once I left a wagonload o' chuck under a piece of canvas in the woods, and when I got back I found about fifty Indians camped 'round it. The cache hadn't been touched, though this was a rovin' band of 'Injuns,' a hundred miles from any reservation. They all begged for sugar but I give only a cupful to the chief, for a piece of venison. That night I slept right 'longside o' the Indians. I liked redskins, and never had any trouble with 'em. Fact, when I heard about some o' the settlers becomin' squaw-men, I was sometimes tempted to trap a squaw for myself." But he never did — at least, not permanently enough to be recorded in a respectable family chronicle.

"I was a volunteer in the Modoc War. There was one battle*

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Undoubtedly that of January 17th, 1873, at which John Merritt was present.

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in which thirty-seven whites were killed and prob'ly not a single

Indian. A whole troop o' soldiers could pass over the Lava Beds without seein' one of 'em. A lot o' Indian ponies was killed."

Such are my meager notes of a talk with Uncle John in 1920, before I had learned the importance of the Modoc troubles in Pacific Coast and Indian history. The narrator has since gone to the Happy Hunting Ground.

It was through no hatred of Indians that Uncle John joined the Oregon Volunteers, about Christmas, 1872. Through old documents in the Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California, and correspondence with John's former captain, Oliver C. Applegate, ninety-year-old son of one of Oregon's most distinguished pioneer families, I have a record of his services. I quote from one of the former:

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Modoc War Claims: Letter from The Secretary of War (Wm. W. Belknap), Transmitting the Claims of the States of California and Oregon, and citizens thereof, on account of the Modoc War (Ex. Doc. No. 45, House of Representatives, 43d Congress, 2d Session, 1874-5?).

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"John Merrit, Services, private, Co. B, and horse, 32 days, at $2 each — $128.00; Less contra account: Jan. 12, 1873, 1 pair drawers, $2; 1 undershirt, $2; 1 pair socks, 50 cts., $4.50; Jan.18, 1873, 1-4 lb. tobacco, at $1.25, $ .62&1-2 (Sic. Total:) $5.12&1-2. (Balance claimed:) $122.87&1-2. Services admitted. Allowed at $13 per month, $13.86; 40 cts. per day for horse, $12.80. (Total approved:) $26.66;"

and

"John Merritt, Services, private, and horse, Co. D., June 1 to 23, 23 days, . . . (Total approved:) $19.16." Like his comrades, John asked "a plenty" -- $213.95, and received little enough -- $45.82, just about half what he would have earned in the sheep business.

He first served, from (c.) December 24th, 1872, to January 24th, 1873, in Company B, raised principally at Yainax and Jacksonville, Oregon, captain, Oliver C. Applegate. Among his sixty-six companions were several Klamath and Warm Spring scouts: Chick-kase, Mosen-kosket, John and Dan Skontian (Schonchin?), Peter Show-case, et al. It must have been a democratic "army." The old record cited shows the account of First Lieutenant J. H. Hyzer charged with a lowly pair of overalls. In general command was Brig. General John E. Ross. His force was small -- two companies: A, Captain Harrison Kelly; and B, Captain Applegate. "Gen. Ross' first work was to cut off communication between the hostiles and the reservation Indians, then to dispatch a force to seek for survivors of the Lost river settlement, and to bury the dead (settlers), whose bodies had now lain exposed to beasts of prey, without sepulture, for ten days." John Merritt, of Company B, may have assisted at this gruesome task. Undoubtedly he was with the Volunteers by Christmas Day, when Lieutenant Colonel Frank Wheaton, of the Twenty-first Infantry, ordered them to the front. They were soon engaged in the rescue of a supply-train that was being attacked by

the Indians. The Volunteers' "teams and wagons being light and serviceable in a muddy region, were used in connection with regular army transportation to good advantage. In fact, there was a blending of the Volunteers with the regular force." On the "12th of January, Capt. Applegate and his company (with others) had a lively brush with the enemy, at the top of the bluff overlooking the Lava Bed(s), in which the Modocs were forced to retire beyond the range of our guns."

Here were "fifty-three Indians, men and boys, (in) this wild pedregal. They brought with them their families, many decrepit old men and women . . . many of them (their braves) under twenty years of age."

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filled and care taken to water every horse and pack mule, as there is no water on the bluff where the main force will encamp on the night of the 16th." The Modoc position in the Lava Beds was attacked early on the 17th of January by: "U. S. forces, about 310; Oregon Militia, 115; California Volunteers, 25 — Total, 450." At 4 o'clock in the morning, the whites marched down the bluff and took their position.

According to Meacham, while the soldiers drank "lightning-bug" or "tangle-leg," the Modocs prayed for a great cloud to descend and confound the enemy. And surely enough, a heavy fog came out of the mountains to the west and settled over the neighborhood. This greatly helped the Modocs to conceal themselves, while it afforded the whites no protection. As the soldiers approached to within a few yards of Jack's hiding-place, they could hear but not see the enemy. In the thick fog, "the howitzers, which had been relied upon to demoralize the Indians, proved useless. As Wheaton afterwards said, 'There was nothing to fire at but a puff of smoke issuing from cracks in the rock;' while the Modocs were stationed at the most favorable points for picking off the men as they hurried past, crawling over the sharp rocks on their hands and feet, suffering terribly." Meacham writes: "The howitzers are taken from the backs of the mules, and prepared for action. 'Forward!' shout human voice and silver bugle. The (whites) answer with a belt of living fire. Not a shot from the Modocs," only cries of derision through the heavy fog. Then, suddenly, "the 'dusky lion's' roar, 'Ot-we!'— 'Fire!' —

and from cavern and crevice bursts a stream of leaden hail, defiant yells. The circling line of bristling bayonets breaks, and moaning soldiers lie now where boasting braggarts stood. Back they fly, leaving the rocks flecked with writhing uniforms of blue." Of casualties, Grover's Report shows "a loss of about forty men in killed and wounded, including two killed of the Oregon Volunteers"— John R. Brown and William F. Trimble. The latter was a comrade in John Merritt's Company B. The Modocs seem to have lost not a single man!

In spite of this showing, Major General John F. Miller was able to report that "the volunteers conducted themselves in the most creditable manner." And Bancroft states, "When a halt was called, the men fell asleep standing or riding. Their clothing was in shreds; their shoes were worn off their feet." The next day John Merritt bought some tobacco — to steady his nerves. They had fought for nine hours, in an extremely cold fog, without blankets or overcoats, these having been left at camp. Next day Captain Applegate with a portion of Company B was ordered to Yainax, Lieutenant Hyzer and a second group to Schneider's Ferry, and the remainder of B to Langell Valley. The Company was disbanded on the 24th.

John Merritt and his horse served again from June 1st to 23rd, 1873. He was now, with about forty others, in Company D, raised in Goose Lake Valley, their captain Thomas Mulholland. Of this period, Ross reported that his Volunteers and some of

the regulars "moved by different routes at midnight on the 1st of June. My troops being the first to arrive at the place designated, and discovering fresh Indian tracks, started immediately in pursuit and followed the trail until night." Next day they continued "over an extremely rough country. At dark the Indians were overtaken and captured. The captives numbered 12, among whom was the notorious 'Black Jim,' one of the murderers of Gen. Canby." Ross then proceeded with his prisoners to an island in Tule Lake.

Captain Jack had been captured on June 1st. On the 14th, 150 Modocs were removed to Fort Klamath. The trial began July 5th. John Merritt's final service may have been, to him, the most painful of all: helping to escort these doomed men to — the gallows. If he witnessed the hanging, he never mentioned it.

Half a century later, one of John Merritt's great-nephews attended the annual Round-Up at Pendleton, Oregon. Like John, he had become a friend and champion of the Indian, with whom, during a first glorious Wanderjahr in the Northwest, he had picked hops at Salem and apples at Hood River. Here, on Pendleton's "skidroad," he had sometimes hobnobbed with dignified Yakimas and Umatillas, at least sharing a package of cigarettes with them, if not actually joining in ceremonial puffs from an authentic calumet. And now, at the Round-Up, he beheld for the first time the beautiful spectacle of a thousand Indians and their horses, all gorgeously dressed in the beads and eagle-feathers of their fathers. For the admiring chronicler of these pages, this

picturesque cavalcade constituted a pageant that might well have been called "Victory in Defeat."

CHAPTER XVIII

A HOOSIER SAMSON.

When my paternal grandfather, Joe Merritt, reached Mackville, in Piatt County, Illinois, about 1867, one of the citizens with whom he would at once make acquaintance was the village saddler and harnessmaker — James Apperson Samson, my maternal grandparent. To know the latter's story, it is now necessary to travel eastward — unlike our pioneering foreparents — retracing old trails across Illinois into southern Indiana, where Jim Samson was born, August 23rd, 1826.

He was the son of Martha Apperson and Ephraim Samson. Martha, the daughter of Sally Cook and James Apperson, was born in Virginia, apparently. It seems likely that her father, born in 1773, was of that large group of Appersons dwelling in New Kent County, Virginia, some of them as early as the 1690's, as the Register of St. Peter's Parish shows. That the Samsons were English, there is almost consistent tradition. A collateral descendant thinks they were "from Scotland and settled in Virginia," but another cousin, of the same line, corroborates my mother's belief that they came from England and "settled in New York and Virginia."

As I have previously related, the parents of my great-grandfather, Ephraim Samson, and of Benjamin, his brother, were killed by the Indians somewhere on the Samsons' westward journeyings.

Massacred too were the parents of Benjamin's wife, Martha Charles, whose mother was also a related Samson. The survivors went to Lexington, Kentucky, moving thence to Paris, Jennings County, Indiana. In the 1830 census of Jennings County, Montgomery Township, appears the name of Ephraim Samson, who ran a woolen mill at Paris from 1820(c.) to 1865. In the latter year the mill was sold to his nephew, Benjamin's son, Elijah. It was at Paris, where this old mill stood, that my grandfather, James Apperson Samson, was born.

His mother, Martha Apperson Samson, has now become, to my generation, little more than a name and a faded old daguerreotype. In this surviving likeness of my great-grandmother, born almost a century and a half ago, I believe I see a markedly Celtic face. Her son often described her as seated at her knitting, Bible in lap, reading the Scriptures without having to watch her flying needles. But this would describe many of her contemporaries, to be sure. Her husband, Ephraim Samson, though I think not English-born, is remembered by my mother as "a regular English gentleman. He wasn't a very big man. He always wore a large black silk tie, that he made into a big knot, and put the ends down in his vest. Grandpa had pale blue eyes, I remember, like Pa's. He wore trousers with flaps in front, like a sailor's. He used to have us children run our hands down his pockets after pennies and we were always afraid to, because we thought there was nothing between flaps and hide! The old woolen mill was still

standing in the 'Seventies, when Pa and me went back to visit his old home at Paris. It was a big frame building, as I remember, resting on a solid stone foundation. I think it stood up in the center of the village."

Though Jim Samson evidently learned the saddler's trade at an early age, he must have worked about the mill as a lad, for when he and my mother visited the old building, he remarked: "Many's the night I've spent there, asleep on the bales of wool." It must have been no mean establishment for it supported Ephraim, his wife, and their six children, and enabled him at last to retire from its activities with the atmosphere of "a regular English gentleman" still clinging to him, and his pockets not altogether empty of pennies for "Dodie" and other grandchildren.

His granddaughter continues: "We visited two of Pa's sisters at Paris, Aunt Nan Jones and Aunt Mariar Whitsitt. Uncle Bill Jones kept a store. He run a huxter wagon through the country. Uncle Hood Whitsitt farmed. They both lived out on one of the main streets of the town. Their houses faced each other from opposite sides. Pa's old home stood nearby, at the end of the street, looking right down it. The back garden sloped down from the house and there were some springs down there, where they got their water. Pa told how they fixed up some kind of a contraption to send the water-buckets back and forth by rope and pulley from the house. I remember the big flat slabs of sandstone, almost as nice and white as granite, that they had for steps, and

for walks. The yards and gardens were of a sandy soil that seemed strange to a girl who had grown up in the black mud and yellow clay of the Illinois prairas."

I fancy that the background of Jim Samson's earliest years was made up not so much of his father's mill, or even village life at Paris, as of the woods and prairies through which "Coffee Crick" flowed. Southern Indiana was — still is — an American Arcadia. Parsons's A Tour Through Indiana in 1840* describes it

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*Pp. 54, 112-13, and 142.

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thus: "The air was soft and warm and heavy with the perfume of the wild plum and the hawthorn. The giant trees, sycamore, elm and beech, interspersed with black walnut, hickory and sugar maple, towered aloft, overgrown with a tangle of wild grape vines. Willows edged the banks of the river and the small streams that often crossed our path. Here and there a group of tall pecans reared their heads heavenward. The pawpaw and the persimmon were familiar to me, and the circuit rider, to whom the woods were as an open book, oft perused, enumerated long lists of plants and shrubs growing indigenously in the country, the Indian turnip, the trumpet vine, Solomon's seal, horse weed, blue flag, mandrake, ginseng, and many others. The woods were full of birds, the robin, the red-headed woodpecker, the black bird, the blue jay, and, most interesting to me, the paroquet in great numbers, a bird with a most brilliant and beautiful plumage but a most discordant shrieking voice. Wild turkeys and wild duck were abundant." Parsons

quotes Robert Dale Owen, of the famous New Harmony community: "You should see the autumn glory of Indiana's forests, the atmosphere of the Indian summer, when for weeks not a cloud appears on the horizon, and the rays of light are mellowed only by that almost imperceptible haze which, the legend runs, comes from the red men smoking their pipes beyond the pasture ground of the buffaloes. The oaks wear a mantle of dark crimson; the creeping vines and underwood are dyed vermilion; the poplars dressed out in yellow; the beeches robed in purple; a delicate flame color distinguishes the rock maple, while the pine stands aside in its somber green, and above, a sky of brilliant blue completes the gorgeous livery of the scene."

Jim Samson was one to appreciate all this beauty, as he did also the wildness of the region. Parsons states that Indianapolis, during the decade of Grandfather's birth, contained but ninety families. "In 1816," says Frederic Austin Ogg, editor of Elias Pym Fordham's Personal Narrative,* "Congress granted the fort-

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*P. 101.

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coming state four sections of land to be acquired from the Indians for a new seat of government. The legislature appointed a commission to select a site, and after a time Indianapolis was chosen, though as yet the place was but a wilderness more than sixty miles from so much as a store; the capital was not transferred thither until 1825" — the year before Jim Samson was born. The woods in all directions had not yet been cut down to a degree

described by an old Illinois friend of mine: I think it was of Indiana, at a later period, that Mrs. William H. Shalburg used to say: "You could cross the state in any direction by jumpin' from one stump to another." Not so, during the earliest years of the boy Jim Samson. As Parsons* records, "there are here great numbers

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Pp. 198-200 and 329.

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of wild pigeons, so vast indeed that sometimes in flight they obscure the sun" and "resort to roosts in such large numbers that for miles nearly all the small branches of a thick forest are broken off by them." The buffalo had disappeared, but his bones were still to be seen at salt-licks, and it had not been long since the trails that he and the Indian had made were first followed by the earliest settlers. Parsons was told "of a flat boat setting out from Jackson County at one time, going down White River, carrying a load of hickory nuts, walnuts and venison hams." And Timothy Flint's Recollections, of the period 1815-25, referring to traffic on the Mississippi, the Ohio, and their tributaries, says: "There are boats fitted on purpose, and loaded entirely with turkeys, that, having little else to do, gobble most furiously."*

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*P. 101.

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The Samson boys, Jim and Frank, must have had no difficulty finding enough game for the entire household, consisting of their parents, themselves, and their four sisters — Sarah ("Sally") Ann,

Rebecca Jane, Nancy Law, and Maria Eliza. Jim, like every other male of his day, must have been skilled in the use of firearms. It is difficult for me to picture my noble, kindly old grandsire, as I later knew him, pointing a gun at any living being. But I know that he did, just as I know that, like everyone else of his day, he drank regularly — but temperately — from his jug of whisky. Nor can I, of this squeamish age, understand a habit that he took with him to the tamer prairies of Illinois. One of the older Jim Samson's favorite dishes was a snow-bird pie! I have heard my mother tell how he used to catch these beautiful creatures under a box-trap, dress them, and bake four-and-twenty in a pie. And this was the gentle old patriarch who used to sing, with tears tracing his ruddy cheeks,

"O the north wind doth blow,
And we shall have snow,
And what will poor Robin do then, poor thing?

He'll fly to the barn,
To keep himself warm,
And hide his head under his wing, poor thing."

If James Apperson Samson ever pondered the vegetarian idea — and he must have, for he was a natural philosopher — his convictions were no doubt similar to those of the American Indian, who blessed Brother Buffalo before he slew him.

He would do much reading as a boy. He was to do a good deal of it throughout his life. One of the pleasant little recollections of him that I have, is his saving for me what corresponded in the 'Nineties to our present day "funnies" — so-called. These were the really clever Palmer Cox drawings of brownies and other contemporary

cartoons. The quality of Grandfather's reading, as an adult even, is all but lost to me. But I do know that his daughter, "Dodie," as a girl fed a native good taste with reading from such periodicals as Harper's and the Atlantic Monthly and, in books, such of the classics as were available in the humble libraries of Mackville. During the closing weeks of Grandfather's life, he read faithfully all news of the Spanish-American War — commenting interestedly upon it even after his mind had almost completely forsaken his body, so that he had to be told each day what had taken place the day before. But even as a lad, I think, he was of a type so philosophical as to scorn learning except for its inherent pleasure. Undoubtedly he read only what he wanted to read — a habit his grandson has always found it easy to follow. We know very little now about his early schooling. But we do know that in 1848, when he was about twenty-one or -two, he became an Academy student at Indiana Asbury, now De Pauw, University, at Greencastle. His daughter thinks that he was entitled to scholarship here by some hereditary right. But to this distinction Jim seems to have attached little importance, for he remained at the institution no longer than a week or so!

Because of my great admiration for this splendid forebear, I have pondered a good deal the probable cause of his leaving so soon an atmosphere that, for all its unattractive aspects, must have contained much that appealed to the tastes of an individual of Grandfather's type. Was the Methodist aroma repellent to him?

Though innately spiritual, in the very finest sense, he was never religious, in the orthodox one. Though he did become a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, this was a mere formality, I am sure. But a likelier reason for his short stay at Greencastle would lie in the possible circumstance of his having received scant, and perhaps delayed, instruction in the lower grades, so that he may have been older than most of his classmates in the Academy.

Thanks to John Parsons, whose diary has much to say about Asbury and other such institutions, we have a quite realistic picture of the life there. Whatever may have been the reason for Jim Samson's leaving, it was not his finding others more blessed than he with worldly goods. As a matter of fact, the son of Ephraim Samson, proprietor of a woolen mill, must have come to Greencastle better dressed than many of his fellows. Asbury University, though not quite worthy of the name Tolstóy gave his peasant school — "a college in bast shoes" — did permit its sons to attend classes in the plainest of garbs. And these were not of the affected simplicity of a modern student's unwashed "cords" and "jeans." They were often the only clothes the fellow had.

Parsons mentions "one Tom Goodwin, . . . who would graduate (at Greencastle) in September (1840). He is tall, slender, with very keen eyes, and a manner which I have learned characterizes the Hoosiers, as they sometimes call themselves, of high degree;

a free and easy manner, though with no tincture of familiarity; a most engaging warm-heartedness and interest in all whom they encounter; a natural independence of manner and thought — most admirable in all its manifestations." And this young gentleman attended church in his "Sunday suit of blue jeans." Parsons himself went "to the little one-story brick (Methodist) church with its one coat of plastering and its rude benches, where, in primitive fashion, the men sat on one side of the room, the women on the other." He speaks of "the simple and, in many cases, poorly dressed congregation" and of the pastor, Dr. Simpson (later the celebrated Bishop Simpson), who entered the pulpit "clad in the blue jeans of the men of his congregation instead of the clerical black," to which a gentleman from Virginia like Parsons was accustomed. I can very easily imagine Jim Samson's being moved, as Parsons was, by the hymns, sung by "untutored voices, full of faith and hope and love."*

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*Parsons. Pp. 286-93.

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Perhaps Methodism was, after all, not so obnoxious in such a setting to the intelligent young Samson. Undoubtedly he, like the Merritts and the Conleys, had experienced his full share of the camp-meeting atmosphere, and so found it not so objectionable in this subdued form. For backwoods revivalism was rampant in the sugar-maple groves of southern Indiana no less, surely, than in the woods and "opens" of Illinois. Parsons testifies to this when

he mentions a certain zealous young Hoosier who "insisted that no one was converted until he could smell fire and brimstone,"* and

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*Parsons. P. 307.

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who of course boasted that he himself had smelt them.

If Jim came to Asbury with a scholarship and clothes fashioned from the product of his father's mill, there can have been few financial embarrassments to cause his departure. Such spending-money as he must have could be earned easily enough. Of the students at Crawfordsville, not far away, Parsons says: "Indigent young men have an opportunity to earn their expenses by cutting wood, being paid 31&1-4 cents a cord for their labor." Jim could swing an ax with the best of them. He was, even in his seventies, when I knew him, a sturdy, quite powerful-looking person. And he never lost, even in comparatively "civilized" Piatt County, Illinois, a certain fragrance of the woods that seemed to hover about him, like a natural halo. Surely this young, vigorous Jennings County Samson could have scattered enough chips to pay even for his tuition, had that been necessary, for it was only about $12 per term. Boarding in private families was also very cheap — $1.50 a week.*

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*Parsons. Pp. 278 and 292.

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Nor was village life at Greencastle so different from that at Paris. The former was "very small and unpretentious." The houses were mostly of logs. The town had a tavern, which I see Jim shyly

entering,"Washington Hall, Kept by Col. John Lynch, . . . a great admirer of Andrew Jackson, whom he in some measure resembles," a fact of which he seemed to Parsons a little too proud. Of the region's inns in general, the diarist has the following to say: "In the course of my travels, I have learned to value the inn where, winter and summer, are gathered the men of the community and the travelers, the lawyers, and judges, where all public questions are discussed, arguments engaged in, sallies of wit exchanged."*

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*Parsons. Pp. 280-1.

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It must, finally, have been Asbury's curriculum that drove the young student away. Here it is, in part: for the Freshman year, "Sallust and Roman Antiquities; Graeca Minora and Algebra, . . . Cicero and Horace, Graeca Majora and Legendre's Geometry. . . . In the Senior year, Natural Philosophy, Political Economy, the Law of Nations, Paley's Theology, Moral Science and Evidences of Christianity."* Though James Samson turned his back on academic Greencastle

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*Parsons. P. 291.

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after a sojourn of but a week or so, I submit to Asbury's successor, De Pauw, the recommendation that there still be conferred upon his memory the degree of Master of Natural Philosophy. He merited it, if for no other reason, by eschewing a course in the Evidences of Christianity, to take a vagabond journey down the Father of Waters.

Grandfather's tramp across the Wabash country to the Mississippi and down the latter to New Orleans took place, I think, just after his brief stay at Greencastle. It was characteristic of him to leave almost no record of this adventure, either in the form of a written journal or in that of spoken reminiscence. My mother tells me that he seldom mentioned it. Yet the trip must have been one of great import to a youth of his temperament — the rough life on the river, the gay and exotic atmosphere of New Orleans, the pictures of slavery, the wild beauty of the country through which he passed. Mother does not know even in what manner he travelled. She has always called it a "tramp," and I suppose the distance between Indiana and the Mississippi was made on foot or, at most, on horseback. The return seems to have been by boat. He appears, too, to have spent several winters on the river, making his living by hewing out railroad ties. No doubt it was during this vagabond period that he had tattooed on his arm James Apperson Samson. (He always insisted that his patronymic should be spelt without the p. "It's Samson in the Bible," he would say.) Only one incident from this colorful life is definitely remembered by his daughter. Stopping one night at an isolated cabin, he rose next morning and sat down to breakfast with the family. As he was being served a helping of johnnycake, the wife of his host, who had herself prepared the meal, said, with remarkable casualness, "Mr. Samson, come into the other room and see what we got last night!" Leading him to the big bed with the trundle at its side, the good

woman showed him a new-born babe, arrived during the night, without medical escort and with no apparent effect on the usual household activities. Mr. Samson, realist though he was, ate his breakfast with something less than his customary leisureliness, and departed.

Returning to Indiana, he became a saddler. He was a true craftsman. Mother has described to me the handsome sets of harness on which she used to see him work — the perfect stitching, by hand. "When we lived at Mackville," she says, "Pa sometimes worked at night. Ma and I used to walk over to the shop and wait till he got through. I'd help him make 'waxed ends' a while, but I gener'ly fell asleep on a pile of leather. Pa wasn't a shoemaker, but an expert saddler and harnessmaker. Gottfried Heinzelmann was the shoemaker at Mackville" and, later, at Atwood, where I often saw this son of St. Crispin building a new shoe around the hole that some needy neighbor had brought in. He and Jim Samson might or might not be compensated for their labor. My mother says: "Pa died with hundreds of dollars still owing on his books. He could never be firm with a debtor. I think he was more interested in helping a neighbor and doing a good job than in the pay. He learned his trade from a man by the name of Clapsaddle."

It was evidently at Lexington, Indiana, that he first became proprietor of his own saddlery. As southern Indiana of that day was a sort of projection of Kentucky above the Ohio, there must have been need of good craftsmen in leather. Was it, one wonders,

on a visit to his establishment, in search of a handsomer saddle than the one her family had brought from Kentucky, that my grandmother, Eliza Jane Robbins, first met Jim Samson? She was, so far as horses and saddles were concerned, a true daughter of Kentucky. It is to her story and background that we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER XIX

A DAUGHTER OF KENTUCKY.

On one of the closing pages of Parsons's Tour Through Indiana in 1840,* the young diarist writes of the Rising Sun Tavern near

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*Pp. 361-2.

New Albany, Indiana, across the Ohio from Louisville. "This hill-top inn was built . . . by Caleb Dayton, who came here from Connecticut in 1826. The inn is of logs but was weatherboarded a few years ago, and is a handsome, substantial structure, with high gabled roof, and great main room on one side of the hall, . . . and a monstrous fireplace. The house has many windows, set-in porches and large wagon yards and a stable to accommodate both stages and emigrants, and the sign painted with the rising sun hangs on an iron arm affixed to a wooden post in front of the house that all may see. 'Tis frequently quite merry here, for great hunting parties come over from Louisville, wearing their fringed buckskin hunting suits, and with their muskets and their hounds, and there is always the stage both ways each day, to say nothing of parties of emigrants pushing into the Wabash country."

~~The father of Eliza Jane Robbins, my maternal grandmother, was a Kentuckian. If the Rising Sun Tavern was not itself familiar~~

Nathaniel Robbins, the father of Eliza Jane, my maternal grandmother, was a Kentuckian. If the Rising Sun Tavern was not itself familiar to him, an even earlier one may have been. Certainly familiar was the atmosphere of hounds and buckskin hunting jackets, for something of the Kentucky spirit has come down through Eliza Jane all the way to my mother. Just when my Great-grandfather Robbins crossed the Ohio into Indiana, I do not know. He died in Jackson County, Indiana, in 1845, his widow, Rosa Young Robbins, living thirty years after him. Though we have only a vague tradition, from my mother, that his sympathies in the growing strife between North and South would have been with the former, we do know that he chose for wife a woman who was certainly opposed to slavery. On at least one occasion, Great-grandmother Robbins lent a hand to the secret workers on the Underground Railroad. From her my mother inherited a little iron kettle which an escaped slave, travelling that route — perilous alike to passenger and conductor — had given Grandmother in gratitude for concealing him under her roof. Her grand-daughter, Lola Samson, remembers that on her one visit, as a child, Rosa Robbins showed her a portrait of some member of the family — one of Eliza Jane's brothers? — "in uniform, with his rank showing on the shoulder of his coat. If I'm not mistaken, he was some kind of officer, and died in the service." A cousin has a recollection, no less vague, that one of the sons died in the Confederate service. One son, Elisha, settled in Tennessee. And it is thought one or two of his brothers went into the Far West where all knowledge of them was lost. Dodie Samson says: "These uncles, Ma's brothers, were real Kentuckians, fond of horses and racing. Pa has told me what a fine horsewoman my mother was. My sisters, Mamie and Rose, liked to ride,

too. Rose had a riding habit and I used to put it on, but only to straddle the foot of the bed. I was always afraid of horses. I'm no Kentuckian." There is, in fact, still a great deal of Kentucky pride in my mother, enough to suggest that her horsy Robbins kinsmen may have qualified for Andrew Jackson's definition of a Kentuckian: when one of Old Hickory's associates on a certain campaign reported to him that a reinforcement of Kentuckians approached, unarmed, Jackson exclaimed, "I don't believe it. I have never in my life seen a Kentuckian without a gun, a pack of cards, and a bottle of whisky."*

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*Andrew Jackson: The Border Captain, by Marquis James (The Literary Guild, N. Y., 1933). P. 259. James here quotes from A History of Andrew Jackson, by Augustus C. Buell, 1904, Vol. I, p. 423.

Who, indeed, in those days, did not keep at least the gun and jug of whisky? Writing of the Conleys, and others, of Conley Ridge, North Carolina, Muriel Earley Sheppard* says: "The old

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*"Cooking in the Carolina Blue Ridge," in The American Home, July, 1934. Used by permission of The American Home.

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folks used to keep a bucket of apple brandy standing on the front porch with a gourd in it so a guest would not have to bother to ask for it. The mountain people have always been enthusiastic consumers of their own home-stilled corn liquor, . . . the fiery, authoritative, corn 'Sampson' or the potent and deceptively mild apple brandy." Pious as were my own more recent Conley relatives —

whose fathers also once dwelt in North Carolina — I have no doubt that earlier generations of them drank homemade brandy as freely as did the Merritts theirs in old Virginia, or the Robbinses, in Kentucky. For even the strait-laced Scotch-Irish Presbyterians of western Pennsylvania, for extreme example, sometimes paid off their pastors in good home-aged liquor. One of the earliest temperance leaders among these West Pennsylvanians "having invited some of his parishioners to assist at a house raising, at a critical moment the men dropped their hands and would proceed no further until the usual beverage was given them."*

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* Proceedings of The Scotch-Irish Society of America, Eighth (1896) Congress. P. 337.

There is another instance, too, of a similar difficulty with the builders of a pioneer church, their demands having also been quieted in good old peach-brandy. No doubt Great-grandfather Robbins kept his jug, like a true Kentuckian.

The Robbins family brought with it, out of Kentucky, something more of the humbler aspects, at least, of a Bluegrass culture than a mere jug of whisky. My mother's mother seems to have carried to Illinois a little more of that culture than was good for her in so primitive a situation as that to which Grandfather Samson took her. She was a good deal too much the lady to be able to adapt herself to the conditions of her new life there. She did, indeed, have a difficult time of it. The vigorous pioneer life that seemed but wholesome and natural to her husband,

would be irksome indeed to this daughter of the South. I do not mean to suggest that Eliza Jane Samson was of the Kentucky aristocracy, for I have no reason to think so. As a matter of fact, in the only definite picture of her background I have, there is nothing to suggest even past grandeur. From my mother's account of the one brief acquaintance with her grandmother, there is nothing to hint at past glory. The latter is remembered as a tidy, sweet little person, living in her simple home in a manner very like that of the average Hoosier housewife of that day. There were hints, if not of poverty, at least of forced thrift and economy.

"I can remember so well when Pa and me visited her. She had an old cherry highboy, and the soldier's ~~Grandfather Robbins's~~ picture hung above this. I can still see Grandma's snow-white tablecloth. It had been patched and patched! but every stitch was perfect. She was a wonderful seamstress. So was her daughter, my mother. Ma did sewing for the neighbors at Mackville. I can remember the clothes she made for the little baby that died. We kept them for a long time. Grandma Robbins hadn't seen Pa, her son-in-law, for about nineteen years when we went to visit her. When she came to the door, she looked at him, and said, 'Why, if it isn't Samson!' She always called him 'Samson.' Grandma was kind of plump, like me."

Eliza Jane and Jim Samson had married in the early 'Fifties. While still living at or near Lexington, they became the parents

of their first little girl, Mary ("Mamie") Eleanor.

I have always sensed, in my mother's recollections, a feeling that Jim Samson, saddler, likeable though the Robbins family must have found him, did not quite attain to the standards expected of a man who had married the daughter of a respected, if humble, family of old Kentucky. "I do not think," wrote Elias Pym Fordham,* in 1817-18, "much can be said in praise of the

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*Personal Narrative. Pp. 168-9.

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daughters of Indiana; they are completely destitute of education. Not so, the Kentucky women. From the little I have seen and the much I have heard, I judge they are the most spirited women in the world. They are exceedingly fond of dress, and are generally very handsome. But Kentucky is growing very rich, and the people are becoming very proud. . . . If it were not for Slavery, Kentucky or Virginia would be the countries for English Gentlemen. A Kentuckian is an Englishman with a little more pride." Eliza Jane Robbins appears to have been one of these spirited women. Like her brothers, she loved horses and riding. Expert with the needle, she would be fond of dress. And she was of a dark beauty that has reappeared in one or two of her granddaughters. Certainly she was proud.

And perhaps this pride made it quite easy for her young husband to persuade her to leave Lexington and its intimate contacts with established relatives and acquaintances, and seek, in Illinois, brighter prospects than that of a village saddler in a

locality where gentlemen rode a horse, instead of humbly making its harness. And Jim Samson had among his acquaintances in southern Indiana at least one person who was hewing out for himself a career quite different from that of running a saddlery. "When Pa and me were in Indiana," my mother relates, "he pointed out the house in which he had known 'old Bill English,'" as he called that distinguished son of Indiana. Just what the association with William Hayden English had been, I am not sure, but it was sufficiently intimate for Jim and Eliza Jane to name their third daughter after the wife of English. And sufficiently friendly for Jim to watch with interest English's rise through the various legal and political honors that ended in his nomination for the Vice-Presidency of the United States.

English, born in Indiana in 1822, came from a hardy stock, the son of Elisha Gale and Mahala (Eastin) English, who settled in Scott County in 1818. In 1847, their son William married Emma Mardulia Jackson, daughter of John F. and Elizabeth (Grigsby) Jackson, of Virginia. It was for Emma Mardulia English that my mother was named Lola Mardula* Samson.

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*Though my mother insists on the spelling Mardula, she also retains the pronunciation Mardulia.

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William Hayden English had been "admitted to the bar at eighteen. At twenty-three he was admitted to practice before the Supreme Court of the United States. . . . In 1850, he was chosen

as Principal Secretary of the convention which framed our present constitution. In 1852 he was elected to Congress, and continued to represent the second district continuously until March, 1861. In Congress he took a leading part, his service covering the period when the Kansas agitation was shaking the foundations of the government. He was the author of the 'English Bill,' a measure intended to settle the vexed question and restore peace. In 1880 he was nominated by his party for Vice President on the ticket with General Hancock. He failed of election, but the campaign left him with a high place in the estimation of the general public."*

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* The History of the State of Indiana, by Wm. Henry Smith (Western Pubg. Co., Indianapolis, 1903). Vol. I, pp. 450ff.

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Thus we see that when Grandfather Samson was nineteen and not in the least distinguished, English, who was not much older, was admitted to practice before the Supreme Court of the United States. Had they been schoolmates? My mother says they were "boys together." Had they gone hunting together in Indiana's woods? Did Bill English symbolize for Jim Samson the public recognition of one's ideals which Jim liked to see a friend enjoy but was not himself sufficiently purposeful to attain? In any case, while English was in Congress, Jim Samson was having some financial reverses — unprofitable investment of his meager savings, or something of that nature — and making plans to move

his family across the Wabash into Illinois. This was but four or five years before the opening of the War. One wonders, therefore, how much that developing conflict and its bitter antagonisms may have had to do with Grandfather's leaving the borders of slavery for a new home above Mason and Dixon's Line.

The decision made, he and Eliza Jane would start on a round of farewell visits. First, to the Ohio region, to say good-by to Robbins kin. Then up to Paris, where Jim's father was still running his woolen mill, and where two of Ephraim's daughters still lived — Jim's sisters, Nan Jones and Maria Whitsitt. This was destined to be Eliza Jane's last sight of her mother: she herself was to pass away, in Illinois, without ever again seeing her widowed parent. It must have been a sad moment when the young adventurers turned their faces toward the Wabash. For Eliza Jane it was, no doubt, a cruel separation. Little wonder that her daughter, Lola, often said, "I don't ever remember hearing my mother really laugh."

But the journey itself cannot have been lonely. They were quite a party. One of Jim's sisters, Sarah Ann, and her husband, John N. Terril, accompanied them. Uncle Jack Terril had, likewise, his twin sisters along, together with their husbands, Arch Lewis and Andy Richey. The latter — known by his neighbors as "Brush Andy," to distinguish him from "Prairie Andy," of the

same surname — a jolly, extremely religious old yeoman, whom I remember very well, used to boast: "I come to Illinois, years ago, with a mule and a dollar, and I've still got the mule! I'm aholdin' my own!"

Let us now see how the Samsons fared, in their new home.

CHAPTER XX

"LICKSKILLET."

During the summer of 1936, a colorful pageant was held near old Mackville, or "Lickskillet," in Piatt County, Illinois, to celebrate the founding of that village in 1836. Among the covered wagons in the pageant was one into which had been built the old bows of the wagon used by "Brush Andy" Richey in his removal from Indiana, with Jim Samson, about 1857. As the reader will remember, it was to Mackville that Joe Merritt and his family came, a decade later.

There is a tradition about the name "Lickskillet." It is said that one of its very earliest settlers was a certain old woman who, to eliminate dishwashing, used to place her skillets on the puncheon floor for the hounds to lick. I do not vouch for this story. Indeed, I wonder if it is not one of those stock legends told in many pioneer communities, but made to appear locally authentic. In southern Illinois there is a Skillet Fork of the Little Wabash. Perhaps some early housewife of that region did her dishwashing by the same simple method. But in the case with which we are here concerned, it was not a stream but a town standing on its banks that became known as "Lickskillet," or, more properly, Mackville. Piatt's history of the county suggests that the village may have been named for its

earliest merchant, a Mr. McNutt. Is it not possible that, as so often happened during the westward shifting of America's early population, some pioneer at the new Mackville, in Illinois, coming, like so many of the neighbors, from Kentucky, christened the hamlet in sentimental honor of old Mackville, just west of historic Harrodsburg, in the latter state?

It stood astride a little creek called Lake Fork. I remember how, as a boy, with a smattering of geography, I thrilled to the idea that the leaf I tossed into this familiar stream might float all the way down to the Okaw, into the Kaskaskia, thence down the Mississippi, and finally, through the Gulf of Mexico, into the sea!*

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* Some of the old French maps marked the Kaskaskia the "R. au Kascasquias." (Pittman.) ~~On Lewis Evans's map of 1755, with Pownall's 1776 additions, the form Kuskuskes is given. (Hanna's The Wilderness Trail, Vol. II, p. 144.) Young George Washington, writing from the region just below Kuskuskies, in western Pennsylvania, refers to the stream in faraway Illinois as "the Kuskuskas." (Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 372-3.)~~ John T. Faris, in The Romance of Forgotten Towns (Harper & Bros., N. Y., 1924), p. 89, speaks of the "Kaskaskia, or Okaw, as the river came to be called, because of the French way of saying that they were going aux Kau, to Kaskaskia." Local geographers of my old Piatt County home, I believe, give the name "Okaw" only to a branch of the Kaskaskia River — that by which Lickskillet creek, or

Lake Fork, reaches the Kaskaskia. James Stuart's Three Years in North America (Robt. Cadell, Edinburgh, 1833), Vol. II, pp. 409 and 466, mentions "the Occa flats," a "very dangerous swamp" near the Vandalia portion of the Kaskaskia.

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The following, by Gerhard,* describes the Kaskaskia as he found it in 1857, about the time of the Samsons' arrival at Mackville: "Its banks, for an extent varying from two to ten miles, are richly garnished with woods and forests of oaks, hickory, ash, maple, elm, and acacia trees." Little, if any, less wild than southern Indiana.

*P. 201.

Though the Black Hawk War occurred in 1831-2, but four or five years before the date we have chosen for old Mackville's beginning, we discover in its history few references to the presence there of any Indians. When, in 1829, John A. Richman settled at the present Camargo, previously called New Salem, New Albany, and Albany, about fifteen miles east of Mackville, "there was a small tribe of Indians to dispute his title to land in what they considered their hunting grounds."* Their resistance was too weak, however,

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* John E. Baskin, in the Tuscola (Ill.) Journal, Oct. 24, 1935, ff.

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to prevent Mr. Richman's settling there and building, in that year, Douglas County's first house — which is still standing. Hugo (earlier Nipantuck), nearby, has the distinction of having been "the scene of the last appearance of the Indians in Douglas County," adjoining Piatt. In the private preserve that the family of Mr. W. T. Lodge has so admirably kept wild for the people of Illinois,

near Monticello, just north of Mackville, are still to be seen the graves of two Indians. "Manasua, 'the Jealous One,' was a beautiful Indian maiden who lived in the locality in the early 1800's. Her grave is on the high slopes above Buck's Pond. Almost a century after she had been buried, members of her tribe came from the Indian Territory and declared that the tribe could have no luck until her bones were taken up and scattered, as it was unlucky to bury an Indian underground. They held a pow-wow, and took her bones up and scattered them through the woods. After the Indians were satisfied that Manasua would no longer bring them ill luck, they returned to the Indian Territory, and the white people of Buck's Pond neighborhood, gathered up the bones of Manasua and again buried them in the grave, filling it with stones and placing a boulder on it. Manasua was reputedly the most beautiful woman of her day. Then there was Cachita, meaning 'the Dark Eyed One,' about whom there was also a beautiful legend."* In Unity Township, in the southeastern corner of Piatt

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* The Tuscola (Ill.) Journal, Mar. 8 and May 17, 1934.

County, in which Mackville and Atwood were both situated, such evidences of a possibly prehistoric race as arrowheads, stone axes, and human bones have been found. The arrow points that we boys of the 1890's picked up in new-plowed fields were doubtless those of the Potawatomi and Kickapoos still to be found, it is said, on the banks of Lake Fork just before its settlement in the 1830's.

Down to present descendants of Lickskillet's earliest residents have come tales, if not of Indians, at least of wild animals that their ancestors still found there. Among these first settlers were the families of William and Richard Monroe, who came to the region circa 1836-7. "The first winter that William Monroe and his wife spent in Mackville was in the home of James Utterback and his family, while Mr. Monroe was building his own home. In January of 1837 they moved into their own log house, which was sixteen by eighteen feet. The cabin was not yet completed, but the roof was on and the floor laid. A bed quilt served for door, the fireplace was built only half way to the mantle-piece, and the hearth was not yet filled up. Two large green elm logs were thrown in the back of the fireplace, to build the fire against. Without table and chairs, Mr. and Mrs. Monroe sat in front of the fireplace, on the edge of the floor, their food placed between them. On the day they moved into their home, Mr. Monroe killed a deer, and wolves, getting the scent of fresh meat, followed him home. That evening, as he and his wife sat eating, as they finished a bone, they would toss it over the uncompleted chimney into the yard. There the wolves would snatch it up and carry it off. When Mr. Monroe ran out to chase them away, the wolves ran off, barking like dogs, into the wilderness. . . . Mrs. Thomas Livengood had been left at home one day by her husband, away on business. When darkness fell, she stepped outside her cabin to look for Mr. Livengood. Thinking he might be within hearing distance, she called his name several times, each time receiving an

indistinguishable reply. Suddenly, thinking it was not the voice of her husband, she stepped inside, setting the pin in the door. No sooner had she done this than she heard a panther leap to the top of the house. Looking through the chinks in the roof, she was able to see the animal lying there, waiting. Thomas did not come home that evening and the next morning the animal was gone."*

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*From the Atwood (Ill.) Herald, Sept. 18, 1936.

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My mother, born on Lake Fork in 1861, has told me of the floral wildness then remaining. The prairie was, in summer, an unbounded expanse of wild flowers. During my own childhood, those borders of field and orchard that the plow had not invaded were massed beds of deer's-tongue, Dutchman's-breeches, Johnny-jump-ups, lady's-slippers, wild asters, and goldenrod. Of all that remained into my own period, nothing was quite so lovely as the blossom of the wild crab. This tree was becoming rarer when I left Illinois, but there must have been ravishing clumps of it in my mother's day. I remember Maude, my eldest sister, used to bring great branches of it home and arrange them on the little New England piano we had in "the parlor." The fragrance, which I have never found surpassed, filled that entire wing of our old house. In my boyhood, too, the wild strawberries still survived, though certainly not in such abundance as described by my mother, or by Fordham*: "You ride in these woods over wild

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*Personal Narrative. P. 225.

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strawberries, which die (sic) your horse's fetlocks like blood," as they had dyed the Indians' moccasins in an earlier day. Written a little later than Fordham's Narrative was this description of Illinois by James Stuart:* "Great part of our road passed

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* Three Years in North America (Robt. Cadell, Edinburgh, 1833). Vol. II, pp. 373-81.

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through the prairie ground, of which above two-thirds of the whole State of Illinois is composed, most beautiful at all times, but especially at this (the early summer) season, owing to the brilliancy of the flowers now in blossom. Plantations we saw here and there, but the general appearance of the country was that of a fine waving surface of strong grass, covered with strawberry plants, and the finest flowers, and with wood on the high grounds and hollows, . . . islets of wood, far more happily disposed than if the trees had been planted by the hand of man."

Writing of a journey, made in 1830, across the "Sangamo" country, just west of Piatt County, Stuart says that the only difficulty "found in the management of the land here occurs on the first breaking up. The roots of the prairie grass are so firmly interwoven with the soil, that it requires all the power and steadiness of oxen to tear up the ground. . . . Eight oxen are most generally employed for the first ploughing." In this connection, my father has told me of the laborious task of first cultivating this prairie primeval. Not only were several oxen employed, but also an exceptionally strong plow, with special

mouldboard. Older residents about Atwood will remember the Wildman family, the picturesque patriarch of which, old Lije, used to be engaged by his neighbors to plow up remaining patches of virgin prairie there. I myself remember this rugged old fellow, though not his oxen nor, alas! the virgin meadows.

In 1850, Gerhard* states, there were but 1,605 people in

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*P. 222.

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the whole of Piatt County. By 1855, about the time Grandfather Samson arrived, the population had increased to 3,052. Piatt, it would seem, was even slower in settling up than Coles, which had 14,937 in 1855. This is a bit surprising to the chronicler, who early gained the impression from his elders that the family's Coles County relatives were, in the 1890's, still a backwoods lot, of a much tardier sophistication than their Piatt cousins. One of my contemporary relatives, himself from Coles, relates the following, to illustrate. In the early 1900's, he visited one of the kindred groups then still living at old Liberty, in Coles County. The good country dinner served him included applesauce. Carl passed this familiar dish to the son of his host, with the inquiry "Will you have some applesauce, John?" To this, John replied: "Aw, you can't fool me: them's stewed apples."

The population at Lickskillet, as in most other parts of the state, was quite purely American. Gerhard* shows that, in

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*Pp. 225-9.

1850, only about one-eighth of the people were foreign-born. The other states that had, up to that time, contributed most to the settlement of Illinois were: New York, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Indiana, Virginia, and North Carolina. Of the foreign-born, most were German, Irish, and English. When the Samson party arrived at Lickskillet, its population must have seemed not unlike that of southern Indiana, from which they had just come. Many of the families were from Kentucky: the Barretts, the Atwells, the Brownings. My mother has given me a very vivid picture of these households. She has told me how, with the other children, she used to sit by the fireplace and light Granny Barrett's clay pipe with a hot coal. Not only did many of these older daughters of Kentucky smoke a pipe, many of them also used snuff, dipping it up on the frayed end of a hickory twig. Among other pioneer families settled near Lake Fork, were the Moores, Shonkwilers, Harshbargers, Crains, Quicks, Monroes, Livengoods, Wildmans, Gregorys, and Garretts. Piatt's history states that Mrs. Gamaliel Gregory was the first white person born in Unity Township. Harrison and Jessie Monroe were the first to die within the limits of the township. They were buried on the banks of Lake Fork.

Of the earliest known history of the village, Piatt* says:

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Pp. 402ff. Omit note

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"There used to be a beaver dam near where Mackville now is. There was also another land-mark, an eagle's nest; and it was not uncommon to hear the question, 'How far are you from the eagle's

nest?' Mackville was started by a Mr. McNutt (according to 'Buckskin Joe' Moore), who rented a house that stood on Mr. Moore's present field, and used it for two years as a store. He then bought three acres of land of Nathaniel Shonkwiler, where Mackville now (1883) is, and put up a store house now owned by Mr. James Sampson. We suppose that the village was probably first called Mack's village, which was soon shortened to Mackville. According to Mr. J. Sampson, Mr. McNutt kept the first store in the present Mackville, in a house which stood on the west side of Lake Fork, and which is still standing." And is yet, ~~in 1937,~~ I am told. We shall hear more of this little structure, when it becomes "the store house" home of Dodie Samson and her parents.

Let us now take a bird's-eye view of the little settlement, as seen, if not by the eagle in the 1830's, by the crows that followed Jim Samson's plow in the late '50's. In the early years of Lickskillet's history, the skillet proper rested on the west bank of Lake Fork, the handle on the east. After the Civil War, the handle threatened to outgrow the skillet, as its citizens began to declare. But at the time of the Samsons' coming, most of the village still lay on the west bank of the creek, which flowed in a southerly direction from its source, a few miles to the north. The road, running straight east and west, crossed the stream at "the eagle's nest" and became Mackville's main street. During the earliest years remembered by my mother, born during the first year of the War, most of the families then

living at the place dwelt north of the road: some of the Grosses, "Ad" Shonkwiler, and his brother, "Nat." The Marshalls lived on its south side. To the southwest stretched the "praira" as Dodie Samson knew and loved it. It was on the south side, too, just west of the creek, that Jim Samson had his first saddlery, and the Merritts their first blacksmith-shop. Piatt quotes Mr. Joseph Moore as saying that it was over twelve years after the first settlements were made in Unity Township before there were any bridges built across Lake Fork.

Later, the crows, going to roost in the patch of timber on the east bank of the Fork, would look down on the several residences and places of business that were, in the early 'Seventies, making the handle top-heavy. The center of what we may call the new town was the Marshall & Griggs mill. This became not only a grist and lumber mill but also a place for pressing sorghum molasses from sugar-cane raised in the neighborhood. The mill stood close to the creek, its back to a considerable patch of timber which our improvident foreparents had not yet destroyed. Between the mill and the general store — the latter on the main street — stood the second shop of the Merritts. Facing the road from its north side, at the east approach to the bridge, stood Mackville's real center — the general merchandise store of Gross & Biggs, which was also the post office. This was a two-story frame structure, with a simple outer stairway leading to the Masonic Hall above. Of this Masonic lodge, Jim Samson was a charter member. He remained, until his death, a faithful, reverent

student of its ritual and creed, of which he used to say that to live up to its high ideals was to insure a man's being honorable and wise. This old building was later moved a mile to the southeast, to become the Gross & Biggs store of the new-born Atwood. It was from the muddy hitching-rack in front of this old Mackville establishment that the boy Johnnie Merritt rode his bay pony, "Dolly Varden," over to Atwood and the railroad, after the mail. East of the Gross & Biggs store in Mackville stood the apothecary shop of Doctor J. S. Marshall. Near this building, or perhaps in it, was the later saddlery of my grandfather. To the north of these were most of the later residences of the town, Joe Merritt's among them, facing the woods.

The Gross & Biggs store would be, of course, the social center of the town. Its post office would make it the rendezvous of the entire population. Through the diligence of Mrs. Nellie Gilmore, who directed the centennial pageant, we are permitted to look over some of the charges in an old daybook used in this store:

"Michael Harshbarger	hog ringer $1.50, rings .50
Peter Maxey	2 doz. clothes pins .50
Wm. Crist	1 spade $1.50
John Easton	set of tablespoons $1.40
Steven Dukeman	vest $5.00, tobacco $1.00
John Linton	bed cord .35
Fred Helton	18 lbs. smoothing irons $1.80
Hugh Dobbs	coat, vest, pants, hat, boots $30.00
J. V. Reed, by George	pants $7.00, vest $2.00, hat $3.50, suspenders .75, socks .30, shoes $2.90, total $16.45
Wm. Early	overalls $1.00, meat, 21 lbs. at 10c $2.10
Chas. Masterson	1 pair specks .50."

Here, then, in the late 'Fifties, Jim Samson and his relatives got down from their wagons and unloaded their "housen stuff," looking about them with eagerness and, perhaps, a little misgiving. Their new home must have appeared to them a rather shabby, pathetic-looking little collection of simple homes and shops, most of them still forming the skillet proper on the west bank of the creek. Here and at Atwood, of which Mackville was to become, in the early 'Seventies, a sort of ghost town, the Samsons and their progeny were to dwell for eighty years, the Merritts for a like period. This, descendants of both groups still call Home -- as does, with a deep nostalgia, the writer of this chronicle.

CHAPTER XXI

BAPTISM IN LAKE FORK.

Piatt's history, of the Illinois county of that name -- in which Mackville and Atwood are both situated -- states that the first person to make a profession of religion and to be baptized in "the Lake Fork of Okaw River" was Mr. Daniel Harshbarger. So closely related to any record of Mackville is that of what we still call "the Harshbarger settlement," that a brief statement of the latter's story becomes necessary here. This I am able to make chiefly through the courtesy of Mr. Thomas R. Livengood, a descendant of at least three of its pioneer families -- the Quicks, Harshbargers, and Livengoods -- who has the good fortune to occupy, still, one of the picturesque old Harshbarger houses just north and east of Mackville.

Of the origins of his ancestors, Mr. Livengood has, at my request, furnished a short account. "As a lad I was chiefly interested in my Harshbarger ancestry. Some one had told us that the name was once Hierschberger. Then my attention was turned to the Quicks, of Westchester County, New York, who, I learned, could trace their lineage back to Thirteenth Century England! And now I hear that my father's people were the Liebundgut family, dwellers in the Prussian province of Hohenzollern," to whose illustrious if now unpopular family the Livengoods, it

appears, may be related. "The first Livengood, Peter, we are told, fled Europe to escape religious persecution. He fought in the American Revolution. His son or grandson, probably the latter, was Hartman Livengood, whose marriage, in 1802, to Elizabeth Edinger, is recorded in Old Goshenhopper (Lutheran) Kirche, in Pennsylvania. Hartman and his family emigrated to North Carolina. His sons were Thomas (who, in turn, had fourteen sons!) and Noah." The latter was the great-grandfather of my present correspondent. "The Livengoods next moved from Davidson County, North Carolina, to that region of Indiana to which came also the Quicks and Harshbargers. My grandfather, Thomas Livengood, was born in North Carolina in 1830. He married Catharine Pearson, in Indiana, coming thence to Illinois, about 1850-60. As a circuit-rider, he travelled horseback over central Illinois, preaching to as many churches as he could reach." Of his settling on Lake Fork, in the days when an occasional panther was still to be seen, I have spoken in the preceding chapter. His grandson and namesake, who was a boy with the present writer on Lake Fork, carries on, supplementing his services as organist at old Harshbarger Church with visits to other neighboring places of worship, as a lay preacher. This is by no means strange, for the present Mr. Livengood, through his mother, inherits yet another "preachin' strain" — that of the Harshbargers.

The latter must have come to America, from Germany, sometime "before ~~1747~~ 1777, for an island in the Shenandoah River was deeded to

one of our forebears in that year. I think there were three or four brothers who crossed the ocean together. During the voyage, the wife of one of them, needing water for the family washing, lowered an iron kettle by a rope over the side of the vessel. During the operation, she lost her balance and fell overboard. She was rescued by one of the crew. So also was the kettle, still in the possession of one of the Virginia Harshbargers. From the Shenandoah Valley, the family moved to Champaign County, Ohio. My great-great-grandfather, Christian Harshbarger, was a soldier in the War of 1812. He married a Burracher or, as the name came to be Anglicized, Boraker. Christian Harshbarger was a Lutheran, his wife a Dunkard. He spent his last years, and died, in my old home. Thus six generations of Harshbargers have lived in the old house." Christian had at least one daughter, Barbara, who married Charles Masterson, and four sons. The eldest, Michael, lived and died at Galesburg, Illinois. Samuel, Daniel, and Christopher all came to Piatt County, where they lived and died. At least two lived beyond ninety. Samuel and Daniel were born in 1810 and 1814, respectively. In their youth, these two brothers, and probably their parents, moved to Montgomery County, Indiana, where they became neighbors of the Quicks. They married, respectively, Theda and Hulda Quick, sisters. Coming to Illinois, they settled in Piatt County, both couples at first occupying the same one-room cabin. "Then, in 1837 or '38, Sam built a cabin for himself and wife. In 1848, Dan, having prospered, built the old brick dwelling I have occupied for several years. The Dan

house was the first brick structure in the community," the second in the county. "The brick were burned here, on the farm. The house was finished in black walnut, the finish being remarkably beautiful for pioneer days. The doors and window sash were cut out entirely by hand. The doors, after eighty-eight years, are in surprisingly good condition. Not to be outdone, the Sams built, in 1853, a second house -- also of brick, with more rooms and a porch. When Uncle Sam had finished his house, he invited Dan and wife over to see it. As evidence that our ancestors, no less than we moderns, strove to 'keep up with the Joneses,' I submit the following: next day, Dan and Hulda -- who had, in their older house, fewer rooms and no porches -- started out, each driving a wagon, through swamp and across wilderness, for Chicago, more than a hundred miles away. Here they purchased two wagonloads of as fine furniture as they could afford. We still have some of that furniture." When Sam and his second wife bought a carriage, "Mrs. Dan gave her husband no peace until they had one too, 'just like, only better.' . . . Still standing near the Dan house are two large cedars, brought as seedlings from Indiana by Dan's elder son, Michael, in his coat pocket. The Sam house had in front of it an avenue of maples, four of which are still growing."

The chief stimulus to the Harshbargers' movements westward was the eagerness to possess land. When Dan Harshbarger came to Illinois, "he thought he, and later his children, would have free range for their stock. He had recognized his mistake long before

he died. Dan secured perhaps 1100 acres, Uncle Sam possibly 1300. That generation acquired land, the next held on to it, but the present is losing its acres. A tale is told of forty acres which I now own. Dan wanted this piece, for he had acreage on either side, but to secure it meant a trip of sixty miles or more to Vandalia, at that time the state capital. This journey, various matters had delayed. But one day he learned that another man desired the land, who planned to start out the following day, on horseback, for the capital. To beat him there, Dan set out, the evening before, on foot. And Great-grandfather got the land. If I remember correctly, he had not yet left the Statehouse with his papers when the other fellow arrived. It was not unusual to drive hogs and cattle afoot to market in those days. Great-grandfather often drove a herd of cattle or pigs all the way to St. Louis, where he was glad to get a cent and a half a pound for them."

It was this doughty pioneer who was the first to be baptized in the waters of Lake Fork. Nicholas Prior, or Pryor, perhaps Lake Fork's earliest minister, is said to have come to the region in the company of the Harshbargers. Whatever may have been his creed, he had come to Piatt with Samuel Harshbarger, who had joined the Methodist Episcopal Church before leaving Indiana. "It is recorded that Uncle Sam preached the first sermon in Bement," just south of Monticello, the county seat. The location of this early service was the station of the Wabash Railway at Bement. The first sermon on Lake Fork itself, in 1837,

was to an audience of ten: the two Harshbarger brothers, their wives, and six others.

Of its earliest beginnings, Mr. Livengood writes: "The old Harshbarger, or Lake Fork, Church came into being on August 10th, 1842, the first church to be organized in what is now Piatt County. There had been preaching in the homes shortly after the first settlers came, in 1836, but no regular services. Then Nicholas Pryor, probably an Indian missionary, came along, and a church organization was given new impetus." There were seven charter members: ~~The names of at least five are known:~~ Daniel and Samuel Harshbarger, Theda Quick Harshbarger, "Aunt" Hannah Moore, Jesse Monroe and wife, and Silas Abbott. "Some of these pioneers were Methodists, some Baptists, and each contended vigorously for his views. The question of denominational affiliation nearly rent the community in twain. But finally a united church was established -- neither Methodist nor Baptist, but simply 'The Church of Christ on Lake Fork,' its only creed the Bible. Later, it did unite with what was known as the 'New Light' Christian Church, now merged with the Congregationalists. Great-grandfather Harshbarger, I remember, used to say: 'The Methodists have had preaching here, and the Baptists have had preaching here, but we New Lights and the Campbellites, over at Antioch, are the only ones that have had churches here.' The Lake Fork church prospered. First a log building was erected. It became, in September, 1852, a member of the Central Illinois Conference of the Christian Church. Then, in 1858, a modest frame building, with Greek lines, was constructed. The land on which

the church stands was donated by Daniel Harshbarger." This was, Piatt says, the second church edifice built in the county.

Much of the material for the building was hauled from Attica, Indiana, on the banks of the upper Wabash. Most of the construction was by the voluntary labor of its members. The late Mrs. William Carroll, daughter of Daniel Harshbarger, once recalled: "My father hewed all the sills for the church, as he was the best hewer anywhere near at that time." The present structure has been built around the floor and walls that were put into the building in 1858. "I can remember," says "Aunt" Barbara Carroll, "the first conference. Two young ladies came horseback and wore long riding-skirts, which were covered with mud, so bad were the roads. An elderly gentleman, 'Father' Wilkins, preached — the first preacher that I can remember, besides Uncle Sam Harshbarger and 'Brother' Fay, who preached occasionally." The last named was Mr. Ezra Fay, "a fine old man" at whose pioneer home the writer's grandfather, Joe Merritt, used to stop, on his trips across eastern Illinois with the mail, in the 1850's. And Joe's youngest delivered it there to Fay descendants, I believe, in more recent years.

Mr. Livengood states that, "though it was, of course, before her day, my mother believes that old Peter Cartwright, famous circuit-rider, preached at Harshberger. The Lake Fork church of logs was the only meeting house for miles around. So Cartwright, perhaps, dropped in occasionally, as his rounds brought him here.

Quite possibly he preached at Ficklin and Mackville, too." Nicholas Prior seems to have been succeeded at Lake Fork by John Collins, Thomas Holden, and Thomas Welch. Following these came the dedication of the second building, in '58, by "Father" Wilkins. Throughout the institution's earlier years, the Harshbargers contributed generously to its activities. And they served no less in the spirit of Martha than in that of Mary: it is said that at one of the Conferences held there, no less than forty persons were quartered in the old brick houses.

I doubt if, in the beginning, the church had, for music, even a tuning fork. Barbara Harshbarger Carroll says: "The first singers I can remember in the choir were: Brother Aaron Moore, the singing master; his brother and sister, Allen and Ruth; his cousin, Sarah Jane, and Isaac Moore; of the Harshbargers: Michael, John, Aaron, Jeff, Isaac, Sam, Neoma, Theda, and Sylvia; the young folks at Mr. Fay's and the Monroes', and many others. . . . I once saw Reverend McDaniel, who came over from Danville every first and third Sunday, baptize twelve men and fifteen women." Half a century later, the present writer sometimes watched the not too limpid Fork receive the sinful, at a point just below Mackville. Proud was the rural church of those days that had even a reed organ. And, as Mr. Livengood remarks, proud indeed was the individual who had a cottage organ in his home. This made him "a nabob in the community. When my grandfather, John Harshbarger, was first married, a travelling organ peddler came around with a

'Western Cottage' instrument, for which he asked $180. He stayed and stayed, until my grandparents began to think they were never to be rid of him. One day he asked: 'What will you give for the organ?' Grandfather, not at all expecting he was closing the deal, answered: 'One hundred dollars.' 'Done!' cried the peddler. And a hundred dollars was a great deal of money to my grandfather!"

There was amusing rivalry at Harshberger over the post of organist when, in 1886, a "Shoninger" was installed. There were three candidates for the place, each named Cora! And at the termination of this battle, another followed: where should the organ stand? A member of the Harshbarger clan suggested a certain position. A daughter of the Quicks had a better one. This difficulty came to a climax when a Children's Day program was given in the church. Mrs. Harshbarger had her way through the final rehearsal. But when the curtain rose on the song of welcome at the performance itself, lo! the organ stood not where she had left it the evening before, but where her rival felt it ought certainly to be. The latter had entered the church in the night and trundled the instrument to the position that anybody but her opponent would have chosen in the first place!

But there had been a much graver battle in 1863 and '64. When, on Decoration Day of each year, I used to go, as a child, to Harshbarger and sit inside the church, looking out over the charming old cemetery where the dust of my Great-grandmother Merritt lay, to the fields and patches of wood beyond, it never

occurred to me that there had been strife here, in this peaceful spot, during the Civil War. But strife there was, between those members whose convictions were symbolized by the political banner of Abe Lincoln and those others whose sympathies placed them in what was, in Piatt County, I believe, a pretty definite minority. On one side were the Quicks and allies. On the other, the Harshbargers, Livengoods, and some of their neighbors. And, one must remember, there had been intermarriages between these groups. The War brought this friction to a climax. A certain deacon of the church, himself a godly and respected man, had two sons in the Northern army. At this distant date I am not at all curious to know whether it was sympathy with the South or the love of a mother for her sons that caused the deacon's wife to persuade him to effect the sons' desertion and their return home, concealed in a load of hay. News of their escape, I understand, came to the ears of loyal Unionists through the quite innocent talk of a child. The Civil War had crossed Lake Fork! It now crossed the threshold of the old church. Men came to the services carrying guns.

Dan Harshbarger's daughter writes: "Some of the Republicans got hostile, and then the trouble made inroads into the Councils of the church. The Republicans were going to throw the Democrats, or Copperheads, out of the church and Conference. Charges were preferred against my father as being in sympathy with the South. He had given the land where the church stood. He had also paid

what had been signed for, but could not be collected, for the building of the church. The organization had given him the keys — he was janitor for many years. Members came to worship with guns and revolvers, as did my father. In one of their heated meetings, he arose and declared that he had prepared himself and intended to defend his home, his property, and his Church, warning all parties not to trespass on his rights, at the peril of their lives. It looked as if the old church could not stand against the storm. The shock to the membership was such that a large per cent withdrew and set about to organize a church at Mackville."

The first church service at Mackville is said to have been held in the schoolhouse in 1858. In 1860,* twelve people "met in

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* For this account of the organization and history of the Methodist Church at Mackville and, later, Atwood, I am indebted to the Atwood (Ill.) Herald, and to Mrs. Laura Lewis, Mrs. Will Albers, Mrs. P. F. Harder, and Mrs. Emory Moore, who prepared the article here quoted, for the 75th anniversary of the Church's founding.

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the old schoolhouse at the west end of Mackville, just opposite the present home of Mr. Joe Dorjahn, to organize a Methodist church. These charter members were Mr. and Mrs. Harve Wilson, Mr. Tom Barker, 'Aunt' Melinda Shonkwiler," and the party of eight who had made the trip from Indiana with Jim Samson: himself and wife, Eliza Jane; his sister, Sarah Ann, and her husband,

John Terril; the latter's twin sisters and their husbands, Arch Lewis and "Brush Andy" Richey. "This group was led by Reverend Dale. Often, however, they were without a pastor, for they depended upon the circuit-rider, who was many times delayed by impassable roads. Often, in the absence of a minister, a layman volunteered to 'expound' the Scriptures. Among early laymen was Mr. Peter Schultz, who believed that when one 'got religion' he was deeply stirred emotionally, and as a result he shouted and proclaimed his faith aloud." Piatt says that "Mr. Riley and Colonel Buckner were probably the first preachers in Mackville."

Soon after the organization of the Lickskillet congregation in 1860, plans for building a church were discussed. This was no doubt encouraged by the disgruntled members from Harshbarger. "In 1872, these early Methodists, as well as those of other denominations, donated their time, hewed the timber, and built the first Methodist church on an acre of land given them by Theodore Richey, where is now the Mackville Cemetery. Here, at irregular periods, a Methodist circuit-rider held services." Free to do so were pastors of other creeds, also. A Reverend McFadden was minister when the church was built. The first resident pastor is thought to have been a Reverend Smith. "These men were not on a stipulated salary. They had other lines of work, or lived solely upon what the members of the parish gave in provisions. The circuit-rider was entertained in the homes during his stay. Sunday school, held only in summer because of the bad roads of winter,

grew to be an important part of the church's activities. All denominations attending, the leader needed great skill and tact to keep down controversies. Among these leaders was James A. Hawks, who later became a member of the legislature. . . . Mr. John Ferril served as caretaker for many years, without remuneration. It is said that once, when oil was needed for the lamps, he used the quarter which was meant for groceries, and the family did without coffee." In 1885, the old building was moved to Atwood. "Many protests arose, not a few feeling that this was sacrilege. Reverend Martin Van Buren Hill was then the pastor, and Elder Hiram Buck the Presiding Elder at the re-dedication. Elder Buck became the character Magruder in Edward Eggleston's The Circuit Rider."

If it pained some of the more devout to see the old temple of God rolled down the road to the less holy Atwood, with its barrooms, what must they have felt when, about 1905, it became the Opera House, skating-rink, and gymnasium! I myself remember its plain, almost shabby, yet picturesque interior as it looked during the last years as a church. And stamped even more deeply on my memory than this picture is the echo of the old bell. It still hangs in the steeple of the newer church — the original bell used at Mackville. "The story is told that Mr. Andy Richey and a friend drove to Tuscola with a mule team to bring back the bell and a wood stove. On their way home, the mules ran away," but with no more serious damage than the loss of the stove-pipe, later recovered.

The cemetery at Mackville, however, continued to be the God's acre for both Lickskillet and Atwood. Piatt states that "Harrison and Jessie Monroe were the first who died within the limits of Unity Township. They were buried on the banks of Lake Fork. Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Harshbarger's twins were probably the first who were buried in the Harshbarger cemetery. This cemetery, which contains two or three acres of ground, was deeded to the public by Mr. Daniel Harshbarger. . . . Coffins for the dead were made by the neighbors of the deceased. Mr. Joseph Moore has an old drawing knife which he used many a time to make coffins." Other burying-grounds in the region were the Moore, the Crain, and, to the south, the Taylor and Cartwright. The Indians were burying their dead near the site of the present Harshbarger Cemetery long before the arrival there of any whites. Mr. Livengood informs me: "There is an Indian mound on the farm of the pioneer, Ezra Fay, only a few feet from the northeast corner of the present churchyard. Some friends from Indiana visited the Fays a great many years ago -- before the present cemetery was formed. Three small children of the visitors, I believe, drowned in a swamp near the Fay home. As there was no way in those days to transport the corpses so far, they were buried on this mound, perhaps the first burials here." ~~It was possibly of these and other mounds that Piatt, in 1883, wrote: "On the banks of Lake Fork and on Mr. Livengood's place there are some mounds at least three feet in height and two rods in circumference. Trees eight inches in~~

~~diameter grow on these mounds and human bones have been found in them. Stone axes and arrow-points have been found in their vicinity."~~

Most of my kin rest at old Mackville. A few lie in the Moore Cemetery. And Great-grandmother Merritt sleeps at Harshbarger. Her Joe's Annie writes: "When Dad had worked up a good trade at Mackville, he sent for Grandpa and Grandma Merritt, down in Coles County. Grandma was very poorly. She passed away, in 1872, at Mackville, the second to die there after the opening up of the cemetery. The first, I believe, was the child of Theodore Richey. Since there was some question as to whether burials would continue there, Grandma was taken to Harshbarger. I have always felt sorry, as she had lived so long at old Liberty,"*

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*Rachel Ann Fitzpatrick Merritt's daughter, "Frank," ~~had~~ married Isaac C. Harshbarger. My clan contacts the Harshbargers at another point: one of my sisters married Isaac C. Harshbarger's grandson, who is descended also from other pioneer Lake Fork families: the Crains, Hamiltons, Monroes, and Quicks. ~~another pioneer Lake Fork family, the Crains.~~

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where her husband, William Merritt, is buried. Others of my Coles County kin sleep at Liberty, in old Whetstone Cemetery there, and in the Otterbein Cemetery, nearby.

Of all these old graveyards, none seems to me more hallowed than peaceful Mackville, from which can still be heard the bell at Atwood. Its ghostly echo, like that of the school bell there,

I still can hear. From my home in California, I often listen to the angelus at St. Elizabeth's, whose tone so resembles that at Atwood that I never hear it without again becoming a boy, listening to those earlier sounds, across the fields and woods of Home! I remember — to digress still further — having once heard the ancient bell at California's Mission San José, as I approached it, one sunny spring morning, tolling a welcome to its present Portuguese parishioners, just as, in Revolutionary times, it had to their Spanish predecessors, now asleep in the churchyard there. No symphony could move me like that sound, reaching across a century and a half of American history. Yet would I prefer, as I write, to any cathedral chime, the familiar song of the old bell at Atwood, to which both my ancestral groups once listened on Sabbath mornings.

The Merritts and Samsons, however, were not church-going folk. I think I never once saw my mother enter even this old Methodist church, though we were sympathetic to it, if to any, at that time. Among the pastors of that flock whom I myself remember, was the Reverend Clark P. Hard, scholarly father of the distinguished journalist, William Hard. But I remember him and the gentle Mrs. Hard not so much because of their residence at Atwood, as of the privilege I later enjoyed of living in their home in Chicago. In those, my university days, Mr. Hard used sometimes to keep us from a warm dinner by uttering long prayers or reading aloud pages and pages from Les Misérables or another of the classics. Once, catching me really more interested in

the reading than in the dinner, he said, with ironic reference to his former congregation at Atwood and its incapacity to understand his scholarly sermons: "Yes, Atwood always listened." One of Mr. Hard's hobbies when, later, he lived in Zion City, was the baiting, by his remarkable intellectual facility, of the famous Mr. Voliva. The latter, I believe, had once been pastor of another of Atwood's churches. Perhaps it was from rides over neighboring prairies, to rural "charges," that Voliva conceived the notion that the earth is flat!

But our narrative has not yet reached that period when sons and daughters were going to Urbana and Chicago to attend the university, nor even ~~to~~ those decades when the old Methodist church stood in Atwood, but ~~to~~ the days when it was still one of the major edifices of the little hamlet of Mackville. Let us now take a look at the village saddler, Jim Samson, hoeing his garden on the Sabbath but feeling, perhaps more than most, the presence of God, in himself, his neighbor, and the concentrated little world of Lickskillet, as he pauses to listen to the benedictory tones of the leisurely old bell.

CHAPTER XXII

A "PRAIRA" HOME.

My maternal grandfather, James Apperson Samson, seems to have known some financial difficulties while running his saddlery at Lexington, Indiana, just before he brought his little family to Illinois, about 1857. While this adverse experience may have meant a great deal to his wife, it probably did not greatly disturb the placid Jim. Grandfather used later to speculate, without great regret, on the amount of land he might have acquired had he come to the new country with a little more of worldly goods than "three dollars in cash, a sack of flour, and a jug of molasses." His brother-in-law, Terril, "had oxen, horses, and three hundred dollars in gold." Andy Richey arrived with "a mule and a dollar." Land around Mackville was very cheap. A few dollars bought a wide expanse of the fertile, virgin prairie. But dollars were not plentiful, and one could not quite trade three axes and two cowbells or a rifle and a bell, for a section of land, as certain Tennessee pioneers are said to have done,* or an alarm clock for some slightly smaller tract, as I

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*Parton's Life of Andrew Jackson. Vol. I, p. 158.

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am told one of my Oregon neighbors did, not so very many years ago. Had anyone deplored Jim's failure to grab broad acres while

the grabbin' was good, he would probably have answered, "And be 'land pore,' like everybody else?" For about five years he put aside his skill as a saddler, to serve some of his more prosperous neighbors as a humble farm-hand.

In 1861, his third daughter, Lola Mardula, my mother, was born, in a log-cabin. "And not a very good log-cabin. The roof leaked, and I've heard Ma tell how, when I was born, they had to keep movin' the bed from under the drip." This rude dwelling stood between the home of "Nat" Shonkwiler and the little frame school that had been opened in 1858. This early home of the Samsons, by the time of my boyhood, had suffered the indignity of becoming a pig-pen. In the days when my mother used to point it out to me, its logs had been covered with rough lumber. I believe it stood on land that had, in my youth, become the farm of a son of Mr. Jacob Gross.

"Dodie" — as her eldest sister mispronounced the name Lola — cannot have been more than a year or two old when her parents left Mackville for a brief residence at Arcola, over in Douglas County. Through this hamlet, earlier known as Okaw,* had ridden

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*Mr. John E. Baskin, in the Tuscola (Ill.) Journal, Nov. 7, 1935, says that Arcola "was surveyed by John Meadows, County Surveyor, Oct. 22, 1855, and was called Okaw. The name was changed to Arcola because there was already a town in Illinois bearing the earlier name."

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my other grandfather, Joe Merritt, in the days before the War,

when he was carrying the mail and stopping regularly at Old Hermitage Inn. My mother remembers nothing of the trip over to Arcola, but often relates an incident in its connection, told her by her parents. Jim Samson, his wife, and the two older girls, Mamie and Rose, were on their way, in a wagon, before anyone remembered that little Dodie had been left, during preparations for the journey, at the home of a neighbor. Naturally, the party drove back and recovered the forgotten parcel. Grandfather opened a harness-shop in Arcola but did not live there long. It must have been an especially unhappy period for his wife, Eliza Jane. Her daughter says: "I think it was at Arcola that we lived in the same house with another family. Ma and the woman had to do their cooking on the same stove. They quarrelled, and for months afterwards worked about in the same kitchen without speaking a word to each other." Mother remembers just one other incident of the sojourn there: seeing a group of soldiers, still in uniform, coming home from the War. Was her future father-in-law, Joe Merritt, among these? Her own father was several years older than Joe and, with a wife and three children, escaped the War. But I feel sure that, however much or little Jim Samson may have felt the burden of domestic entanglements, he was not sorry to miss the War. He was not one to catch easily the contagion of wartime passions, though he would not be slow, either, to help right a wrong in temperate, intelligent ways. Had he been younger and unmarried, he would probably have offered himself in service to a

despised people.

Difficult days followed the family's return to Mackville. "Samson" worked as a farm-hand, for Jim Browning and others, on the prairie south of the town, living for a brief time in a little log dwelling on the road to Pierson, west of the Levi Drew "castle" of my imaginative boyhood. Of their life in the Browning neighborhood, my mother says: "Ma had a hard time. She, too, sometimes worked for the Brownings. They were also from the South, like our other neighbors, the Barretts. Aunt Peg Browning was a Barrett, sister to Ike and Pete, and Dave, who later run the hotel at Atwood. . . . My mother was proud, and she had had her own little home in Lexington, Indiana. On days when both Pa and Ma went over to help Jim and Aunt Peg, Mamie and Rose and me kept house. I remember how we used to look across the praira at dusk, waiting for Pa and Ma to come home. Once it grew so late that we got frightened and started over to Brownings' after them. Ma was pretty strict with us, and when she saw us, instead of letting us wait for her, she ordered us home without her. By that time it was gettin' dark and we was pretty scared, crossing the praira all by ourselves. The road was just two worn paths in the tall grass, and we expected every minute to hear a rattlesnake.

"Pa used to drive us over from Brownings' to visit the Nat Shonkwilers. They were prosperous, but everybody's home was plain in those days. I remember the Shonkwilers had a latticed-in porch,

clean but bare, with just a table and chairs. But what good things to eat they had! Fried chicken and everything to go with it. I can still taste the white honey the other Shonkwilers — Ad's — had. They'd make us children shoo the flies from the table with elm branches. Children did as they were told in those days. And they were taught to respect older people. I remember old Captain Barrett, father of Dave and his brothers: if a boy said just 'Yes' to him, he would say 'Yes, sir!' Grandfather Samson — my grandfather — was quite a gentleman, too. Pa was never fussy, but he taught us always to be polite. He used to say: 'Speak to a stranger, even if you don't know him.' . . .

"The neighbors used to come spend the day at our place, too," where they were served food just as excellent and no less abundant, from Grandfather's fine garden. "We wasn't as well off as some of the people around Mackville, but we always had plenty to eat, certainly." There was not only plenty of the usual milk products, poultry, fruits, and vegetables, but many an item that would be, to James Samson's progeny, even in fruitful California, a rare delicacy: hickory nuts, black walnuts, wild-grape jelly, on hot biscuits with homemade butter. Both wild-grapes and persimmons were "sugared down, a layer of persimmons on a layer of sugar on a layer of persimmons (or grapes). Pa always raised his own citron and we sugared this down, too, for mincemeat. We had our own eggplants, though we never ate them. I used to ask, 'Pa, why do you raise them? We don't know how to cook them?' And he'd answer, 'Oh, because they're pretty.' And

watermelons! Pa used to pick a ripe one early in the morning, with the dew still on it, and roll it under the bed, on the puncheon floor, to keep it cool. Though he raised loads of them, he never sold a penny's worth. I remember he once told me I might sell some to the store and keep the money, but I was too timid. And of course he was too impractical. He'd give 'em away."

Piatt, writing of the Lickskillet citizenry, says: "Most of these people, or their descendants, have successfully built up homes in this township, and in every way are well-to-do people. From our transient contact with this section of the township, we think that they probably retain more of the good old ways of pioneer life than any other people in the county. We found here several of the old substantial two-story hewn log-houses, with their great fireplaces." These friends of the Samsons were a sort of aristocracy of the community, though a very democratic one, for those were days when aristocracy was based much more upon a general excellence of character and less upon financial eminence than in later days. (I like to think we may, just now, be returning to that same arc of the cycle.) Jim Samson, for that matter, was of the "aristocracy," though not quite in the sense I mean here. For there was an upper stratum of society even in the period and locale of which we now speak. The aristocrat had broad lands and a big, hospitable, though far from elegant or luxurious, house. Neither he nor his

less successful neighbor felt very greatly this distinction. Yet it was there. I still see evidences of this in my mother's references to these old acquaintances, in spite of the perfectly free and familiar entrée she had to their family hearths. Her mother, as a daughter of Kentucky, would feel it much more than her not too ambitious father. It is a thing difficult to speak of, lest one exaggerate.

Piatt says that the first school in the district in which Mackville was situated "was taught in a log house on the place now (1883) owned by the Widow Shonkwiler." My mother thinks that a deserted school building in which her family lived for a brief time, following the Browning period, was of logs, and remembers that it stood just outside Mackville proper, to the west, either on or beyond the Ad and Nat Shonkwiler farms. Since the first school in Mackville itself was held, in 1858, in a structure not of logs but of sawed lumber, it was probably in that earlier of Mackville's two seats of learning that the Samsons dwelt, for it is not likely that there was any other building used to house Lickskillet's "scholars" between the date of its settlement, 1836, and '58. In the latter year Mr. James Lewis opened up classes in the frame building in which both Dodie Samson and Johnnie Merritt got all the learning they ever acquired. At any rate, I like to think that it was the old house whose walls of logs had absorbed the platitudes droned from the pages of McGuffey by the village's pioneer children that the

Samsons occupied soon after the War. Jonathan Wildman, said by Piatt to have been Unity Township's earliest teacher, was doubtless the master here. I can imagine the reluctance of Dodie's mother to attempt to make liveable this old ruin, which had probably been the haunt of no creature less eerie than bats and mice during the several years since its last pupils had abandoned it for the newer, but not much finer, building put up in '58. This second continued in use until a third was opened at Atwood, I believe in the 'Eighties. The next move of the Samsons was to still another log-house, on the Ad Shonkwiler farm, situated between "the pig-pen one," in which Dodie had been born, and Lickskillet's second school building.

Though my mother still enjoys her memories of the community's more affluent households, her reminiscences contain more of a nostalgic beauty when they are of the humbler homes that Eliza Jane's pride and industry made lovely. For her mother was one to make the plainest of shelters beautiful. She was an excellent housekeeper. The puncheon floor was always quite immaculate. Always in order was the one large room, in spite of its containing, besides the stove and other kitchen equipment, the big bed and the trundle. Expert with the needle, Eliza Jane no doubt achieved those dainty feminine details that converted the crude cabin into an attractive home. Through the two or three windows and the door would be pleasant vistas of the garden. Of all the things of which my mother speaks, that garden seems the brightest. "Pa always raised

about twice as much fruit and vegetables as we could possibly use. And such flowers! A path went around the house from the front, and this was just banked with every kind of flower you could think of."

They had no patriarchal fireplace. In at least one of their dwellings they used, instead, a "step" stove. My mother describes this as having, for its lowest "step," the hearth; for its second, the fire-box, with two plates; and for its topmost, a sort of oven,above the fire proper, this also with two plates. "I can see Pa now, watching Ma or me fry doughnuts — 'crulls.' We'd put the hot plate on the hearth and as fast as we'd lift the crulls out of the grease, Pa'd reach over and eat 'em." Their various cabins, like those of many of their neighbors, were lighted only by the open fire and, during the earliest years, by the crude lamp of those days: a twisted bit of cloth dipped in a saucer of melted grease. Pioneers of still earlier days relate that the grease then used was the melted fat of the bear or, in the Far West at least, of elk and other large animals. Wayman Hogue, in Back Yonder: An Ozark Chronicle,*

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*Minton, Balch & Co., N. Y., 1932. P. 8. Used by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons.

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says that he remembers seeing his mother "put sycamore balls in a saucer of grease, and light the end of the stem. This made a dim flickering light." During the Samsons' earlier years in Piatt County, it was necessary to go all the way to Bement,

fifteen or twenty miles away, for "coal oil." My mother tells of one such trip when her father and a neighbor, Gottfried Heinzelmann, Mackville's shoemaker, encountered real peril in a blizzard. Obliged to stop their horses, they thought for a while that theirs was to be a snowy grave, on the cold prairie north of Mackville. "Pa often walked to Bement. He was a great walker. When he was a young man, he tramped along the Mississippi, for miles and miles. I guess that's where you got your fondness for hiking. Pa never hurried. He'd start out with Mr. Heinzelmann or somebody and the other fellow would light out with a rush but Pa'd always overtake him. That's about the way he went through life."

When my mother was six or seven, living in "the Ad Shonkwiler cabin," tragedy came to the little household. It reached them first in the death of a fourth little girl, Emmaretta, who died in infancy. Only a few months later, it returned, demanding this time the life of the greatly loved and terribly needed wife and mother. This, when little Dodie was the merest child. What must have been her thoughts as she saw her mother carried from the home to a place beside that other fresh grave, in the isolated Moore Graveyard, two or three miles north and west of Mackville! To me, that old burying-ground, on the sloping west bank of Lake Fork, was always a lovely spot. But to the three girls and to their sensitively natured father, it must have seemed a dark and lonely one in which to leave one's beloved.

Mr. Alfred L. Marshall, an old schoolmate of my parents,

who has drawn, from memory, after three-quarters of a century, some quaintly beautiful sketches of old Mackville, once wrote me: "I cannot remember ever seeing your mother's mother. She must have been a very fine woman, else she could not have been the parent of three such fine girls, all of whom I knew and remember quite well: Mamie, Rose, and your mother — handsome girls, who would have attracted attention in any community. Rose was a blonde," with very light hair and beautiful brown eyes. "One incident in connection with this girl I have never forgotten. I was a boy of about ten and she a couple of years older. As a reading lesson, one day, in the old McGuffey Reader, we had the story of a sick mother who asked her daughter to bring her a glass of cold water. The daughter, busy at play, asked why she did not have a servant bring it. The mother, in tones of disappointment and reproach, said: 'Will not my daughter bring her poor sick mother a glass of cold water?' The mother died and the child, heartbroken, said, 'I would give worlds, were they mine to give, if my mother had lived, that I might have asked her forgiveness for my seeming ingratitude.' Rose had lost her mother not long before, and at this point in the lesson she broke down and wept and was excused from the class. To me, it was real tragedy, which I have never forgotten."

Back in Paris, Indiana, where James Samson had spent his boyhood, still lived two of his sisters, Nan Jones and Maria Whitsitt. To her Aunt Nan, Jim entrusted his eldest, Mamie.

Rosie went to live with Aunt Maria and Uncle Hood. With his little "Dode" he could not bring himself to part. My mother has told me how she wept at the news that she was to be separated from her sisters. She thus became a little woman, almost over night. She learned to cook, to sew, to do all the things that any adult housewife had to do. It seems evidence of something very fine in my grandfather that she learned to do them all well. How many fathers, left with a little daughter, would have the sense of order and efficiency, not to say the heart! to make a model housekeeper of that child? Yet that is exactly what she became, before she was in her teens, with the guidance of her admirable parent.

When she was about thirteen or fourteen, she and her father enjoyed together what must have seemed to Dodie a joyous adventure, though to Samson it would be touched with sadness: they took a trip back to Indiana. My mother has never stopped talking about it. Nowadays, central Illinoisians think nothing of motoring for a week-end in Indiana; in the 1870's it was a real adventure to cross the Wabash for a visit with Hoosier kin. "The country around Paris and Lexington seemed to me the most beautiful in the world. After the prairas of Illinois, the hills there were mountains! Even Pa thought so: when we came to a steep hill, on our way to Mamie's, he would get out and walk." They went first to Paris. "Uncle Bill Jones had a store there. I remember Aunt Nan so well. She was kind of stout. She had the most beautiful hands!

Pa had nice hands, too. Mamie was married now, to Solon Harrod. Rose lived with Uncle Hood Whitsitt and Aunt Mariar. Uncle Hood farmed near Paris. Here Pa saw Coffee Crick again, and showed me the house in which he was born."

Their most enjoyable stay was at Mamie's. "It was about ten miles to the Harrod farm. Uncle Bill drove us there, in a spring wagon. I remember we had to ford the crick and the water came up to the hubs. We sat on chairs, in the wagon, and we had to drive right up the crick for quite a ways. The bed was solid stone. I was scared to death!" The Harrods were a splendid pioneer family, belonging to that solid, worthy yeomanry that I like to think of as America's true and only aristocracy. For much information about them, I am indebted to Susan Winter (Mrs. H. C.) Atkins, of Indianapolis, daughter of Ferdinand Winter. The latter was "the recognized head of the Indiana Bar at a time when its lawyers were of national importance. He is a wonderful man, and is now (1934) over ninety and at the end of his days. He is the son of an Englishman, Charles Henry West-Winter, who married Elizabeth Ann Herod." Of the Harrod line with which I am here concerned, Mrs. Atkins writes: "The ancestral branch of Solon T. Harrod does not, I think, come into early Kentucky history, as some descendants believe, except perhaps by a distant connection with Captains James and William Harrod." But whatever their previous history, these Harrods were early pioneers of southern Indiana. Three brothers settled in Scott and Jefferson Counties,

in 1818: William, Samuel, and Isaac. "According to the tradition which consistently runs through all three branches of this family, their derivation is from 'James Harrod and his wife, Elizabeth Stewart,' the latter the daughter of Rebecca Marchant and James Stewart. William, the eldest of the three Harrod brothers, came to Indiana with Isaac in 1818, from Gallatin County, Kentucky. He was born in Kentucky in 1779, traditionally near what is now Louisville. He married Elizabeth, daughter of Jethro New, in Gallatin County, in 1810. They had several children born there before coming to Scott County, Indiana, where they settled on land four miles northeast of Austin. William Harrod and Elizabeth New had a large family, one of their children being Samuel Bowmont Harrod. The latter had, among others, Solon T. Harrod," who married Mamie Samson. Both are buried in the Harrods' "private farm cemetery, lying on the highway and containing over twenty graves, kept in good condition. The farm is still owned by descendants of the original owner and many of them reside in the neighborhood."

At the time of my mother's visit, Mamie and Solon Harrod were living here. It was a charming spot, as I know from my mother's reminiscences. "The <u>old</u> Harrod place — Solon's father's place — was up on the high land. The graveyard was up there. Solon's old grandmother, 'Granny' Harrod, was still living in the original log-cabin back of Solon's father's. Solon just had little patches of corn in the low places. He and Mamie had a log-

house down there." Those who remember Solon Harrod, including my mother, have told me of his splendid character and attractive personality. Of his wife, Mamie Samson, too, I have a very definite image. She was a handsome woman and the pictures of her I have seen suggest the pioneer mother, so different from any modern woman except, rarely, in those less progressive regions of our country where the modes of life have undergone fewer changes during the past half-century.

From the Harrods' to Lexington now went "Dode" and her father. The other two daughters went with them on this pilgrimage to their Grandmother Robbins. The latter, ~~now a widow,~~ had received Rose and Mamie on previous visits, but her third granddaughter she had never seen. Dodie and her father entered the neat little cottage alone. After greeting "Samson," the old lady turned to study the youngest of Eliza Jane's children. It was not long after this first and only visit of my mother that Great-grandmother Robbins also passed away.

On their return to Illinois, Rose accompanied them. She was quite a young lady now, and had caught something of the Kentucky spirit from this contact with her mother's people. She and Mamie had both become excellent horsewomen, whereas Dodie remained, throughout her life, afraid to mount even the steadiest old work horse. One of the things Rose brought back to an admiring Mackville was a smart riding habit. Gay though her spirit was, it was destined to be stilled in death soon after

her return to Mackville. And the last months of her life were saddened by an unhappy romance. My mother says: "Rose had a love affair with a certain fine, good-looking young fellow. But they never married. His father was to blame. After she came home from Indiana, Rose went to live with Charley Wilson's mother, as a kind of companion. She had a good home with them. Then she got sick. Before she passed away, her sweetheart used to come and sit at her side. I've seen them together, he holding her hand. They continued to love each other. . . . I remember she used to say, 'I won't be buried at the Moore Graveyard!' where our mother was buried. But they took her there. The night before the funeral, I stayed at Andy Merritt's place. From where I slept, I could look out and see the sheet spread over her body. For hours some of the neighbors sang Long, Long Ago. Over and over. It was a terrible night for me."

It is a remarkable fact that, though my mother's youngest years were crowded with tragedy, this seems to have left no mark on her: though she has always been gentle, infinitely tender, at the end of almost eighty years of battle with the ineluctable difficulties of life, her spirit is serene, her philosophy, above most, hopeful. Much of the credit for this should go to the beneficent love and training of her father.

It was not much later that Jim Samson was called back to Indiana by the illness of Mamie Harrod, who died in childbirth but an hour or two before her father's arrival. With the passing also of Grandmother Robbins, the severing of all maternal ties

had become complete for Dodie.

She had never known her paternal grandmother, for Martha Apperson Samson had died before Dodie was born. Her grandfather, Ephraim Samson, had then taken a second wife. "Grandpa Samson had married a Widow Wright, in Indiana. She had a son, Willie Wright. They came to Illinois and lived north of Atwood — east of Mackville — across the road from the Franklin place, when I was just a little girl. They lived in a log-house and had a well with a windlass. I used to like to look into the old chest Grandpa had brought from Indiana. It had his silverware, his things, in it." But this union was an unhappy one, and Great-grandfather at last packed his personal belongings in the old chest and returned to his daughters, in Indiana, where he spent the rest of his years, near the old mill. Of his farm near Mackville, his son James inherited a few acres. These he sold to his sister, Mrs. Terril, and with the money bought "the store house" or "Doctor Mitchell place," where Dodie was to spend the remainder of her girlhood and where she was at last to become the wife of Johnnie Merritt.

CHAPTER XXIII

"THE STORE HOUSE."

My mother's now quite idyllic recollections of her childhood chiefly have for their setting "the Doctor Mitchell place," or "the store house," as it came to be called. In 1866 Grandfather had become Mackville's first saddler, opening up a shop just west of the creek, on the south side of the road and, later, taking up his residence at the Mitchell place, near by. This latter boasted two buildings, one of logs, set several yards back, and a second, a frame store building, flush with the street. Doctor Mitchell had occupied the log structure before the War.

Piatt says: "Dr. Mitchell was the first regular physician of Mackville, and he was followed by Dr. James Lewis, Dr. Lucas, and Dr. Marshall." Another of the old-time physicians was Doctor Meeker. Writing of the years when he and others served the Lickskillet community so faithfully, Mrs. Nellie Moore Gilmore* says:

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*In the Atwood (Ill.) Herald, Sept. 18, 1936.

"In the struggle against disease there was slow, weary travel over prairie dust and mud. In homes inadequately equipped for medical service, the country doctor had only the assistance of kind neighbors. Often four or five members of a family were ill at the same time. In the home of John Quick five children were stricken

with diphtheria and all died within two weeks. The doctor at Mackville was sometimes called upon to go great distances, even as far as to Chesterville, a long journey in those days." Another early physician at Mackville was Doctor Spies, who later practiced at Tuscola. Others, in early Atwood, were Doctor "Dan" Abrams, Doctor B. T. McClain, a jovial Kentuckian of gigantic proportions, and Doctor J. A. Pinckard. The latter was the favorite of our immediate family. His was a brusque devotion truly noble. But to return to their earliest predecessor — my mother says: "Doctor T. J. Mitchell — Thomas Jefferson, I think his name was. He used to take me along on his visits, when I was just a little girl. He drove a team of mules and he'd leave me outside to hold them. You can imagine how I felt behind a pair of mules when I was afraid even of horses! He lived at Milmine then and I used to visit his family there. He had served in the Northern army as a surgeon. While he was gone to the fighting, Mrs. Mitchell and her daughters lived at Mackville, in the loghouse. It was several years later, after my mother had died and Pa had married Susan, Mrs. Mitchell's sister, that we moved into the store house."

This place, which Grandfather Samson purchased from Mitchell, was historic, if one may use that word to describe anything pertaining to a place so obscure and unhistoric as little old Lickskillet. Mr. McNutt, the village's earliest merchant, conducted his first store at a place that Piatt seems to locate

just outside the later confines of Mackville. McNutt then bought, from Nathaniel Shonkwiler, three acres within the ultimate boundaries of the hamlet and put up "the store house" that became my mother's home. Thus the Samsons dwelt in what I think was the settlement's original schoolhouse and, sometime after 1867, in the first store building of Lickskillet proper. Dodie says of the two Mitchell buildings: "We lived in the store house and used the log-house only for a summer-kitchen. Later, Mr. George Wiley, who had returned from the War blind, lived with his family in the log-house and we continued in the other."

Dodie's stepmother, Susan Caroline Boyle, had been a teacher -- at the Harshbarger School, I think -- before she became the second wife of James Samson. She had had no very happy life. She herself had known the loss of a mother and, in her case, the misfortune of a stepmother. She had come from Kentucky, where her father had owned a mill. Her sister had married Doctor Mitchell. There was a bit of unhappy romance in this, for the young surgeon had first courted Susan. And -- to anticipate by many years -- after the death of Jim Samson and of Mrs. Mitchell, Susan and the Doctor married at last, thus completing in the 1890's, or later, their story begun before the Civil War. I, of course, never saw my maternal grandmother, but I remember very well, and with affection, this second wife of Grandfather Samson. She seemed a genuine grandparent to me. I remember once being bitten by a dog, while playing at my father's shop, and of going to "Grandma" Samson, then living in Atwood, for sympathy and first aid. I

found both. I remember entering one of the rooms of the old house (where I myself was later to live) and of finding seated there my grandmother and an old neighbor, Mrs. Jacob Erhardt, forming together, in their sombre dress and the gloom of the semi-darkened room, a sort of double exposure of Whistler's portrait of his mother.

But this is a sketch of her in her later years. When she became Dodie's stepmother, she was an active, rather nervous woman, under middle age. Being an excellent seamstress, she increased the family's income by opening up a dressmaking and millinery shop in the store house, which, with a few shelves and a sewing-machine, now became the place where the women of the town purchased their gowns and bonnets of post-War days. Another source of revenue that Susan Samson had, was the raising of young plants of the Osage orange, for the Maclura hedges that were then making a neat checker-board of the open Illinois prairies. At that period, this was quite an important industry in the state.

This one, too, of Jim Samson's homes was beautified with a garden filled with vegetables and flowers. "The well," Lola Samson remembers, "was just a square wooden platform, with a bucket tied to a rope, and a forked stick to duck it under the water with." A grove of walnuts grew about the place, as about so many other Illinois homes in those and later decades. For the black walnut, like the hickory, was an important item in the life of everyone born in that place and time — from the moment he first slept in a cradle built of its wood until some artisan among his neighbors

fashioned his casket of the same material. Even in my youth there was scarcely a farmhouse in Piatt and neighboring counties that had not its clump of walnuts, the wood of which was once so little valued and, later, in such demand. In the Tuscola (Illinois) Journal of June 22nd, 1933, I read: "One of the old landmarks of this community was lost Monday, when the old Howe home, situated on the farm of Ralph Howe, was destroyed by fire. This house, as far as is known, was the oldest house in Douglas county, having been built in 1853.* The house was of solid black walnut, even the

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*Mr. John E. Baskin, in the Tuscola (Ill.) Journal of Oct. 24, 1935, mentions a house — which he says is still standing — erected by Mr. John A. Richman, in 1829, in Camargo Township, also in Douglas Co.

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weatherboarding being walnut. After the fire, the hewn frame still stood. . . . It was the birthplace of Mr. Perry Howe, who states that it was in good condition and would have stood for a good many years yet. What a house of solid walnut would be worth if it were built in 1933, we dare not estimate." For in 1933, not every Illinois farm had its grove of walnuts under which, in my boyhood, were to be seen the owner's threshing machine, hay-rake, and other implements. My father tells me of one period when the wood of the walnut was in such demand that even the stumps were purchased, as they stood.

Under this clump of walnuts, near the old Mitchell house, Dodie used to play with her dolls, for she was still a child,

even though she was the real housekeeper for the three. Her stepmother, never attracted to any domestic duty but that of sewing, spent most of her time at dressmaking. However, she was not the traditional stepmother, but a conscientious, true mother. She was destined never to have any children of her own. A son, named James, for his father, died in infancy and was buried with the other baby, Emmaretta, in the Moore Graveyard.

But a stone's throw from Susan's hats and sprouting bois d'arc, Grandfather opened up a saddlery. He may have learned his trade through the influence, perhaps under the direction, of some of his mother's people. In later years, a James Apperson, whom Grandfather called "Uncle Jim," though it is not certain that that was the exact relation, used to visit him from Decatur, Illinois, where he too was engaged as an expert saddler, with a Mr. Starr, pioneer in the industry there. Dodie Samson remembers Apperson's taking prizes at the Springfield State Fair for skillfully and beautifully made saddles he exhibited. Jim Samson had had some instruction, too, from a certain Mr. Clapsaddle. Though the sign above the shop door may have included the word "Saddlery," this was no doubt becoming more and more a misnomer, for its proprietor would, by this time, be called upon for plain work-harness much more than for fancy saddles. He doubtless regretted this, for he was a true craftsman, delighting in workmanship that was beautiful as well as serviceable. "Pa was a saddler and harnessmaker, no shoemaker. Mr. Heinzelmann mended shoes in the same shop. He used to sleep there. One night, one of Gross's cows stuck her head in the window and when Mr. Heinzelmann saw her horns, he

thought it was the devil!When I was just a little bit of a girl, Ma made me a doll — cut it out herself and stuffed it. And Mr. Heinzelmann made a beautiful pair of tiny shoes for it, just like a real child's shoes. And he covered the hands with little gloves. People wouldn't have time, or take time, to do such things these days.

"We always lived on the west side of the crick. Of an evening, after supper, Pa would say, 'Well, I'm goin' over to Lickskillet for a while,' and Ma — my stepmother — would say, 'Now don't be gone long.' My own mother always called Pa 'James Apperson.' She'd say, 'Let's go over to the Nat Shonkwilers'? James Apperson.' My own mother never lived in the store house. After we moved into it, my stepmother used to beg Pa to take out the old shelves that were there when it was used as a store. Pa would say, 'What harm are they?' I used to make them look as nice as I could with shelf-paper. Finally, Pa tore them out.

"Later, he moved his shop over to the east side of the crick — to 'the skillet handle.' I think — yes, I'm sure — it was in the old Doc Marshall store building. I know Pa was in business there when Maude, my first baby, was born, 'cause I remember it was then I run the needle in my hand. It's been there ever since. Almost sixty years. It was the old Marshall building, where Pa had his second saddlery, that was moved to Atwood. Pa had his shop in Atwood in that same old building, till he died. Then John Terril had it." The Terril shop I myself remember,

though my grandfather no longer worked there. When the Atwood bank, which the elder Theodore Gross founded, erected one of the new town's first brick buildings on this site, the old Mackville saddlery was pushed back to the rear, if I remember correctly.

Mr. Alfred L. Marshall, writing of the Jim Samson he knew as a lad at Mackville, says: "He was known to everyone in the village as 'Uncle Jimmy.' He had a white beard and a thick shock of white hair. He was a great favorite of us children, always kind and pleasant, and his shop was our principal loafing place. I can see him now, sitting at his bench, making or repairing harness or our skate straps, or walking back and forth, making waxed ends. He often told us interesting stories of the wild woods along the Mississippi River, where he spent several winters as a young man, chopping and making railroad ties. Deer and wild fowl were more than plentiful at that time. He was a strong Republican, and his favorite newspaper was the New York Weekly Sun. He was a fine man and loved and respected by all who knew him, young or old."

Among older loafers in his shop would be Joe Merritt. I do not know that these, my two grandsires, had met before Joe brought his family and settled in Lickskillet, but this seems likely. Though I am told that Joe, when carrying the mail, in the 'Fifties, did not call at Mackville, I know that his itinerary brought him to the Ezra Fay home in the Fershberger settlement, and I have had Joe himself point out to me two giant elms, at my old home in Atwood, beneath which he rode with mail for Monticello. Hence it is

likely that he occasionally made a side trip, from the site of the then unborn Atwood, over to Lickskillet. Here he might visit the Samson saddlery, for repairs to his saddlebags, perhaps. Was he here or elsewhere on his route, I wonder, on that day in May, 1858, when a tornado struck Arcola, or Okaw, and destroyed sixteen buildings there — just about all there were! At least, he doubtless sought shelter from other storms, now and then, at Mackville. Stepping into Samson's shop, he might be warmed with a drink of whisky from Jim's jug. Like many another good citizen of those days, Grandfather Samson was never without a supply, though he himself drank temperately. His daughter says: "I saw Pa drunk just once in my life. He'd been huntin' with some of the neighbors, and drank too much. It was winter. I remember Ma had to take his shoes off for him. His feet was almost froze."

During Dodie's later girlhood in the store house, while her father was still in business at Mackville, there was intimate association with the Mitchells. This was an important fact in my mother's development, for these relatives of Susan's were people of considerable culture. Dodie's then closest friends were: her schoolmate and neighbor, Anna Gross; her future sister-in-law, Annie Merritt; and May Mitchell, daughter of the Doctor, and niece to Susan Samson. This third chum of Dodie's married Mr. J. A. Hawks, a man who was to be a leader in the commercial and cultural affairs both of Mackville and of Atwood.

"J. Addison Hawks*. . . was born upon a farm in the town of

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*From his obituary, in the Oswego (N. Y.) Times, June 29, 1923, as quoted by the Atwood (Ill.) Herald.

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Hannibal. Oswego County, New York, July 19, 1847. He attended the public schools of his native town until seventeen, when he enlisted as a member of the Third New York Light Artillery, an old organization then in the field. While his battery, a part of the advance column of General Schofield's army, was engaged with the enemy near Kinston, North Carolina, his section, with its considerable infantry support, was attacked and captured, every horse on Mr. Hawks' gun being shot down. He was taken to Richmond, where he was confined for a short time in the notorious Libby Prison.

"Coming home after the close of the war, he entered Falley Seminary. Later he taught school in Sterling and then in the village of Hannibal. In 1869, Mr. Hawks went to Illinois and settled in Piatt County, at that time largely undeveloped, but lying in the heart of the corn belt. He engaged in teaching and later became successively merchant, miller, dealer in grain and lumber, and banker, all with success. He served for two separate terms in the Illinois Legislature. . . .

"Returning to New York, he settled in Phoenix, where he became president of the Phoenix bank.

"About 1878, in Illinois, he married Miss May Mitchell, who died in 1905.

"Mr. Hawks was a positive character, possessed of great init-

iative, energy and courage, and was always a leader. A broad and careful reader and an extensive traveller, he was a most enjoyable companion, and made a host of friends. He is survived by his daughter, Miss Mildred Hawks." The latter, I believe now living in London, is remembered for her lovely voice and the beautiful braid of hair that almost touched the hem of the long skirts worn in the 'Nineties, when we dwellers in Atwood caught admiring glimpses of her, home from boarding-school for summer vacations.

Though life in post-War Mackville may have been somewhat more complex than that at Liberty, down in Coles County, on the arrival there of my relatives, it was, compared with our present entangled existence, still centered in very simple activities, such as church services and "singin'-school." A Mr. Fears, a sort of itinerant "professor" of music, was one of the best remembered coaches of Lickskillet's youthful singers. Among these was Addison Hawks, May Mitchell, Anna Gross, Dodie Samson, and Johnnie Merritt. The Merritts are, almost without exception, naturally musical.

Is it only coincidence, I wonder, that what one might call the cradle of the American singing-school was the old Joseph Funk homestead, at Singers' Glen, twenty or thirty miles from Churchville, Virginia, where the music-loving Merritts once dwelt? "Henry Funk . . . with his wife and large family . . . left Pennsylvania in 1786 and journeyed southward into the wilderness of the Shenandoah Valley. His eleventh child, Joseph," became a sort of Father of the Singing-School. Although this

"probably had its genesis in New England about 1770, it is doubtful if any other man in America did as much to make it popular as Joseph Funk. . . . Whence came his yearning for music is uncertain." Will Ruebush, a Funk descendant, once "heard it said that some early member of the Funk clan sojourned for a time among the Moravian people of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, whose greatness in song is a highlight in the cultural history of this country."*

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*From an article by Evelyn Norcross Sherrill and Ben Hibbs in the Country Gentleman of Sept., 1934.

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Undoubtedly such European influences as that of the Moravians upon American music was considerable in regions where these cultures touched. And it may be that one of the elements in the Merritts' universal love of music, as in that of the Funks, was this contact with Old World influences in states like Pennsylvania and Virginia. In any case, from whatever source, the Merritt genius invariably seeks, in its humble way, to express itself in song. Johnnie Merritt, despite his perfect masculinity, developed into a tenor, thus contradicting the declaration — whose truth I am nevertheless inclined personally to believe -- that a tenor is not a voice, but a disease. (Is not a basso, also?) Under Professor Fears, John Merritt learned to sing well and to read expertly. From the same instructor he had a few lessons on the little organ that Joe Merritt managed somehow to buy, about this time — perhaps, as my mother thinks, the first in Mackville.

Dodie Samson seems to have had a sweet voice, too. She still has, though in her seventies, and goes about her daily tasks, singing in a manner very unlike that of most persons of her age. She sometimes tells proudly of one conquest she made with her voice. Singing-school had a visitor one evening — a stranger whose identity is now lost. Listening to the group in the old schoolhouse, he was so impressed with Lola Samson's talent that he offered to take her away and give her a musical education. But the young lady's father, probably suspecting mixed motives, answered: "Not for a million dollars!" This, notwithstanding Jim Samson's pride in his daughter's voice. "Pa used to tell me I was going to be a Jenny Lind. The tears would come in his eyes when I sang. But it didn't take much to make him cry. I can still see him standing up in the back of the old church, at one of Professor Fears's programs. I think my father was the best man that ever lived! He never spoke unkindly to me in his life, and when I was raising my ten children, he used to say, 'Dode, what you can't do by kindness, you can't do at all.' . . . This tintype here, of Annie Gross and me, was taken the day we won first prize with our singing, for the Mackville Sunday school, at a picnic in Gross's Woods. We sang 'The Ninety and Nine,' or something like that. The church bought new songbooks with the prize money. Annie and me sang the verses of the song and the others joined in on the chorus."

Of the musical ability of Dodie's friend, May Mitchell Hawks,

I myself know something. In the days when I was winning a little attention from my elders, including Professor Fred Jeffers, of the Tuscola and Atwood schools, with a pleasant boy's voice and the ability to sing do, re, mi to any song, however new, Mrs. Hawks was directing the musical affairs of the old Methodist Church, and training us Merritts and other children for cantatas given there. I remember in particular her singing along with my sister "Hade" and me a duet, "Bonnie New Moon." Also a sort of sailor's song that a schoolmate, Ralph Heerdt, and myself sang. I can still hear Ralph's lofty "High Ho! High Ho!" and see the throaty gymnastics in and out of his no less lofty stiff collar, as he made his top notes echo through the old building. "Quaker" Heerdt had a fine child's voice, too. I still hear, also, the sweet voice and impressive diction of Mrs. Hawks, who represented to my childish mind that fortunate local aristocracy from which I, as the son of a blacksmith, felt myself somewhat barred — much more than there was any need to feel, in so democratic a society. One of the greatest delights of my early boyhood was a daily trip to the Hawks "mansion" with a pail of milk from our Blackie. As compensation for this errand, I was each time ushered into the dining-room, with its, to me, rich furnishings, its sideboard heavy with silver, and its table always holding a cut-glass bowl of fresh doughnuts, of which I was invited to partake. Mrs. Hawks, being the daughter of Doctor and Mrs. Mitchell, was the favorite of Lola Samson's stepmother.

Consequently, May and Dodie were good friends throughout the years. I remember an incident that must have been a bit embarrassing to the latter. At one of my visits to the bowl of doughnuts, Mrs. Hawks inquired why I had not been attending Sabbath school. I answered, ingenuously, that I should come, regularly, "as soon as Mommy made me a pair of pants out of Poppy's old ones." Nor have I forgotten a little comedy in which Mr. Hawks figured. Like most children in Atwood, Hazel and I, in distributing May-baskets to our friends on the eve of May Day, used to go annually to the front door of some family who, like that of Mr. Hawks, would return the compliment next day by taking us to the local soda-fountain. One year, after special effort to make a handsome basket for Mr. and Mrs. Hawks out of one of the thin wooden ovals used in those days to hold a pound of butter, we hastened to deposit the gift at the front door, rang the bell, and then hid ourselves in some shrubbery near by. The door opened hospitably, Mr. Hawks stepped out and, in his most pompous manner, surveyed the porch -- with one carpet-slippered foot crushing the token of our childish esteem! Nevertheless, we enjoyed our usual chocolate ice-cream-soda.

I remember very well the last time I saw Mrs. Hawks. She had come to Atwood from New York, on a brief visit. I can still see her imposing figure, draped in lacy, summery clothes, her long, ruffled skirts, with the rustle of silken nether garments, sweeping along Atwood's dusty main street. Her stately presence

there seemed, even to a boy of ten or twelve, as incongruous and dramatic as would that of Mme Nordica, or Bernhardt herself. And to have her pause and greet a mere lad like myself, seemed as wonderful as if she had indeed been the Divine Sarah. Once, when I was no older, I stood with others to see the few strangers who might step down from the evening train. Among these was a son of our neighbor, Mrs. Wrightsman, home from medical college. As they were about to pass, Mrs. Wrightsman halted the young physician, and said: "Edward, this is one of Johnnie Merritt's boys. Speak to him. He will remember you, though he has probably outgrown your recollection of him." This gesture, from a woman who read no books on etiquette but who doubtless had a simple, natural wish to be kindly and gracious even to a small boy, has always seemed to me the very symbol of the finest sort of tact and good manners.

But let us return to the days when the primadonna-like Mrs. Hawks was only May Mitchell, one of the pupils at Mackville's singing-school. Annie Merritt, too, must have attended. Her brother, John, did — a fact of importance to the development of our story. Annie and Dodie probably walked home together, with Johnnie shyly bringing up the rear. It is not unlikely that Jim Samson went after his daughter each night, lighting the way with a little lantern he used to carry. I still remember the silhouette it made against the black night, duplicating the pattern of the perforations in its metal shade. John and Annie would bid them

good-night at the store house, where they would find Susan Sawson still making her perfect, closely matched stitches in a new party dress for Doctor Mitchell's May.

CHAPTER XXIV

ROMANCE ON LAKE FORK.

The Samsons had lived at Mackville about ten years when, in 1867, Joe Merritt, his family, his ailing mother, Rachel Ann Merritt, and the latter's kinsman, Jeff Fitzpatrick, all en route to Kansas, stopped for the night at Lickskillet — to remain there fifty years or more. Joe's son, Johnnie, then a boy of ten, recollects that they spent their first night in the log-house of Peter Maxey, whose wife, Minerva, was also a Fitzpatrick. This cabin, of square-hewn logs, I too remember, for it was still standing in the 1890's.

Joe's daughter, Annie, says: "Daddy bought a little house and a shop at Mackville and went to work. He had a good business and raised a big family. Grandmother Merritt went back to Coles County and lived several years, though always delicate. After a while Dad needed someone to help him in the shop and sent for his parents. So Grandpa sold out at Liberty and came up to Lickskillet, with Grandmother. She was very poorly now. Aunt Mat was a young girl, big enough to do the work." Annie's favorite uncle, Bein, came also, and worked for a while at the Mackville shop, no doubt contributing an element of fun in an atmosphere always heavy with industry wherever a group of Merritts gathered. (I have never known anyone who could so lose himself in work as Johnnie.) In

1872, the mother of Joe, Bein, and ~~ten~~ eleven others passed away and was buried at Harshbarger. Aunt Annie continues: "After a while, Grandfather Merritt made a trip down to Coles County and married a widow he had known." But, like many such unions, it proved not very happy, though William Merritt's second wife is remembered with respect, by Johnnie among others: "I think she was the mother of 'Lijah Conley's wife. She took good care of Grandfather and nursed Bein until he died," while still a young man. "Uncle Billy" Merritt, as his neighbors called him, spent his remaining years at his old home on the "Ambraw."

And now Joe's generation of Merritts dwelt no longer on the Embarrass but established themselves on Lake Fork. Writing of Mackville and its founding in 1836, Piatt's history records: "Mr. Moore says it was over twelve years after the first settlements were made in the township before there were any bridges over the Lake Fork or there was a blacksmith-shop in the neighborhood. Before that, it was customary to put buckskin boots on the horses for them to slide over the ice with." The village of Lickskillet had had at least one smith, however, prior to Joe Merritt's arrival. Joe's "first blacksmith-shop at Mackville was west of the crick. Then Daddy moved across to the other side, where the mill and most of the business was. I think we first lived, too, on the west bank. Then we had a house on the east side, near the cemetery."

By the time a boy of that period was ten or twelve years old, his elders expected him to show something of a grown man's capacity

for hard work. One of the first tasks assigned to the somewhat runty Johnnie in his new home was that of helping to load logs, for the Marshall & Griggs mill. "Jeff Fitzpatrick told me how to worm the logs up a skid, warnin' me against the danger of havin' one of 'em roll back down, on top of me. It was my job not to let 'em slip back. Well, I was only a little bit of a devil, I didn't understand just what I was to do, and I was too timid to let Jeff know I didn't. Pretty soon a big log flew down the skid and just missed me. Jeff got pale, cussed me a little — just like Daddy would have done — and sent me home." Joe, in those days especially, was a stern master and Johnnie's apprenticeship was a severe discipline that left a mark on his character — a discipline neither to be altogether deplored nor completely recommended. Johnnie relates an incident that shows the absolute obedience to one's sire so common in those days and so rare in ours: "Once, when I was a boy, working at the shop and carrying the mail between Atwood and Mackville, old Henry Gross played a trick on me in front of the Gross & Biggs store at Lickskillet. There was a regular pig-wallow of mud and water in front of the store. A plank, used by the customers when they got in and out of their wagons and buggies, had worked out into the middle of this loblolly. As I drove up with the mail, one day, Henry Gross said, 'Johnnie, go get that board.' I didn't hesitate a second but waded through the mud and fished out the plank. Gross laughed and said: 'Well, your father has certainly trained you up right!'"

He had indeed, and the boy had his difficulties at the shop of his quick-tempered parent. He says: "Sometimes I felt I was havin' a pretty tough time of it, with Daddy for a boss. I remember he had to drive over to Tuscola after blacksmith's coal once, and he left me to run the shop. I had to do chores for Mother, too. When Daddy got back from his trip, he found me hard at work, thinking what a good boy I'd been — and what a man. But he hadn't been home five minutes before I saw him comin' after me with the buggy-whip, shoutin' 'I'll teach you to let the hogs chew up my horse-shoein' apron!' Some pigs had got into the shop while I was chopin' some wood for Mother, and ot his leather apron up. Daddy had the Merritt temper, all right."

That "Merritt temper," as I have said, descended to some of Joe's children and grandchildren. To Zell, his daughter, among others. Once, in a fit of it, she hurled a boot through one of the windowpanes, and Irena, to shield her, substituted for this downstairs window one from the second story, where Joe would not notice it. As a matter of fact, Joe rather liked this spunk in his daughter, so that instead of flying into a rage himself when, on another occasion, she disobeyed him, he controlled himself, became very grave, and announced that she should have "a black mark put in the Bible against her name." And it is still there, I am told. Perhaps, as Joe wrote it down, he thought of his own sins: of the time when, in a tantrum of impatience with a cow the Couleys had given Irena, he beat her so unmercifully that she actually died

before he had got her home. Old hunters of the early West had a saying: "A buffalo will not die as long as he is angry."* Perhaps

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*The Hunting of the Buffalo, by E. Douglas Branch (D. Appleton & Co., N. Y., 1929). P. 165. Used by permission of the D. Appleton-Century Co., N. Y.

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this accounts for a fair longevity in the Merritts: in my father, ~~nearing~~ past eighty; in Joe, "foxy" until his death, at eighty-four; and in his brother, Sam, who lived to be almost ninety. But this hardly holds water, for Great-uncle Sam was the most even-tempered of them all.

"Yes, Daddy was pretty mad that time the hogs got his apron. Pigs run loose all over the town in them days. We used to call the side-street that run from the mill, past our house, to the graveyard, 'Pig Dung Alley.'" And Dodie adds: "The pigs left fleas in the mud. I can see Ag and Em Bradford picking their way across the puddles. One of them used to go to your place to give you lessons on the organ. They were fine-looking women. Related to the Brownings and Barretts. They had beautiful clothes. My stepmother used to sew for them." Though the comfort of these and other belles of the town created the need of a hog shreeve, none ever functioned, apparently, for Joe Merritt's Docket Book, though it records the impounding of wandering cows and horses, makes no mention of any porcine "estrays."

Another trauma was left on my father during the rigid training of his childhood, by his parent's unnatural attitude toward money. In those years, when actual coin was so difficult

to get hold of, and when building up material security for one's family was regarded as almost the first virtue, that attitude was all but universal. ~~It was Joe Merritt's.~~ I have already told how Johnnie turned over every cent of his pay, as mail carrier, to his father. And the excessive urge to accumulate hard cash has not changed in Johnnie with the years. It is interesting to me to see proof of this in the fact that, though he is scarcely less generous than others in most ways, in those involving hard money his psychology has not altered since he was a lad, earning his first dollar. To illustrate: his children might come and eat at his board for the rest of their lives and be welcome, but he still deals out, even to my mother, after ~~almost~~ sixty years, an allowance certainly not so meager as in the lean, difficult days, but in a manner not a whit less reluctant. Dodie, on the other hand, shares all with a prodigality natural in a daughter of the unpurposeful Jim Samson.

Dodie Samson and the Merritt children of course attended the same school, at the west end of the village. There Dodie and Annie Merritt became the friends that they were to remain throughout their lives. And there began Dodie's romance with Johnnie, when both were mere children. The latter was soon a steady helper at Joe's forge, near Lake Fork, and the favorite rendezvous was the old bridge over the creek, to which the young smith had to come after water for the slake-tub. I doubt if there was any great intimacy, at first, between the Samson and the Merritt households, except that common in such communities. Jim Samson

would know Joe Merritt well, as a fellow craftsman. And Jim often took his best watermelons over to Joe's invalid mother.

The romance of my parents must have been an idyll, not just to them, but actually. Dodie's mind, though perhaps a little romantic, would be perfectly chaste. And Johnnie, though in daily contact at the shop with the not very subtly veiled vulgarities of Joe's customers, would, like most country boys of his day, be little less innocent of the actualities back of those vulgarities than Dodie herself. I dare say he had just a wholesome, unmorbid knowledge of the hidden aspects of life that any boy should have. It is difficult for modern urban sophisticates to believe that, in spite of a muddy undercurrent found then, as now, among country people — and not city folk?! — the average rural youth was quite completely free, until he reached a normal age, of unwholesome sex consciousness. This was amusingly illustrated for me, not many years ago, by an Oregon neighbor who, despite his having always lived in "the tall timber," somehow gave the impression that he had grown up into roughshod mountain manhood in a rather unsavory way. His fine little wife corrected this error when she told me of their courtship: "John kept a-comin' and a-comin' to see me, but he always stopped at the front gate, and just said good-night. Finally, I up and said: 'John, if you ain't never goin' to kiss me, you needn't see me home any more!' And he did."

While on the subject, I should like to state my conviction that any biography, individual or group like the present, is

incomplete and indeed false, to the degree that it omits, through some real or supposed necessity, a consideration of the sex lives of its characters. For how important a factor in most lives is sex, and how neglected, usually, in any record of them. To tell my family's story well, I should have to reveal, to the great disgust of all my kin! just how Uncle X. "ran off with another woman," how unsatisfactory was Uncle and Aunt Y.'s nuptial night, and how Cousin Z. escaped a shotgun wedding. And data for such a true record would be all but impossible to obtain, notwithstanding clannish gossip. How, for example, is one to ~~mention~~ discuss the several obvious homosexuals — not to mention the suppressed ones — inevitably appearing among the five or six hundred descendants of almost any genearch? — appearing, as contemporary science and psychology see, not through any inherited "taint" but because a certain percentage of homo- and bisexuality is the norm. Or how, in telling of Uncle Q.'s ten children, is one to add that the first was a woods colt? It simply can't be done! ... And now, not to leave Johnnie's moral status hanging in air — foul air, I hasten to add that it is my impression he sowed few if any premarital wild oats.

He says: "I had two sweethearts. I couldn't, for the life of me, say which I liked better. If I bought a present for one of 'em, I bought the same thing for the other. One day, an old neighbor woman says: 'Johnnie, this won't do. You've got to make up your mind which one of them girls you want to marry.' And so I did. Up to that time Daddy had never paid me a nickel for helpin'

at the shop. I didn't have a cent. But finally I asked Mom there if she'd marry me. And she said, 'Well, I guess Ma would give us a feather-bed and a few things like that.' So we decided to marry. Next I had to break the news to Daddy! I was carryin' the mail then, and had a pony. So I said: 'I'm goina get married and I've got to have some money. I'd like to sell you my pony.' Daddy bought it and Mom and me went to Tuscola to buy some things. A bed, a commode, a rockin'-chair, a table and some straight-backed chairs, a safe, and a few things."

They were married in the humble "store house" of the Samsons, September 12th, 1878. The Reverend George W. Rippey officiated — that excellent farmer and admirable spiritual pastor who christened, married, and buried so many in Mackville and Atwood, before and during my own life there.

Johnnie continues: "Daddy and Mother had just moved to Atwood, so me and the bride moved into their empty house at Mackville, on Hog Alley. We didn't try to fix up anything much but the front room and the summer-kitchen." And my mother takes up the story: "Annie Merritt — we was always like real sisters — helped me clean and fix the house up. John bought a secondhand stove. I remember it had two legs missing and we had to use bricks. We didn't have a stitch of carpet. It was so cold in the front of the house that we used to take the feather-bed and roll it out on the kitchen floor, by the stove. Anyway, everything was mighty clean when Annie and me got through. Maude was born in that house." The next day, Johnnie relates, "old 'Buckskin Joe' Moore, Bill's

father, come over to see the new baby. When I told him it was a girl, old 'Buckskin' spit a stream of tobacco-juice and said, 'Next time, Johnnie, make it a boy.'" I myself never knew Buckskin's generation of tobacco-chewers, but I knew Bill's: one of the annoyances of my early years was having them aim, quite successfully, at my bare feet.

Soon after the birth of this first child, my parents moved to Atwood, along with many other families who felt the wisdom of settling in the new town that had sprung up with the coming of the railroad. But before we follow the Merritts, the Samsons, and others thither, let us take a farewell glimpse of old Mackville, through the eyes of a small boy, in the 1890's.

CHAPTER XXV

A MIDWESTERN ARCADIA.

Emma C. Piatt must have felt some of the charm that Mackville and vicinity had for me, in the 'Nineties, when, in 1883, omit circa, she wrote: "From our transient contact with the people in this section of ~~the (Unity)~~ township, ~~we think that they probably retain more of the good old ways of pioneer life than any other people in the county. We found here several of the old substantial two-story hewn log-houses, with their great fireplaces. . . .~~ omit We observed a great deal of the good old-time neighborly feeling and we found characteristic pioneer hospitality. There was not a great deal of ceremony about this, but you could not fail to see that you were welcome. . . . At the time of our visit to Mackville there were over twenty-five houses, seven or eight business houses, a Methodist church building, and a school. We understand, however, that a number of these buildings have been moved to Atwood, the nearest railway station."

By the late 'Nineties there remained scarcely a dozen residences in old Lickskillet. Nor was there a single industry left except the quaint, crude carpet-weaving establishment of Henry Ernst, to whom the women of the neighborhood still brought their strips of calico, to be woven into rag-carpet. The Methodist Church now stood on Atwood's principal street. And the

only evidence left that the older town had ever been anything more than a cluster of humble homes was the "store house," even this having become the residence of the Polk Mathews family. It is a commentary on the dearth of architectural beauty to be found in my then little microcosm that I never think of this old store building without remembering a small-paned bay-window it had -- where Susan Samson no doubt displayed her Easter bonnets and where, it may be, Lickskillet's earliest merchant, Mr. McNutt, placed the few luxuries he had to offer his customers. Even so slight an architectural detail was impressive to a small boy, hungry for beauty, whose world was still limited to the boundaries of Unity Township. ~~The "store house," I am told, is still standing. It must be more than eligible for its diamond jubilee.~~

The very earliest definite recollection I have, not alone of Mackville but of anything else pertaining to my childhood, is that of being taken by my mother to what I think was a Decoration Day service in the old graveyard ~~at Mackville.~~ This was indelibly stamped on my memory by my fright at the opening lines of the oration of the day. Evidently the speaker was a forceful one for his dramatic utterances set me to howling until I was carried to a quieter corner of the cemetery. I was not, surely, more than four or five, as I am reluctant to believe I was quite so timid at any greater age! I remember nothing, of course, of Mackville at that time — about 1894-5. But I have a clear picture of it as it was only three or four years later. That is to say, before the close of the century. It had already become a

charmed spot for me by '93, when my beloved Grandfather Samson was buried in its cemetery.

It has sometimes seemed to me that it is one of the peculiar facts of my nature that I have the capacity to love places quite as deeply as I love persons — if, indeed, not more so! I feel this with respect to my wilderness home in Oregon and I feel it, perhaps still more, with regard to my old home in Illinois. And so, there has always been for me a certain benedictory aura about the little hamlet of Mackville, which I knew so intimately as a child and youth. No doubt this is largely due to the idyllic reminiscences of my mother. But not altogether so, for it really was a charming spot.

My father, when carrying the mail between the new railway station and Mackville, used to ride his pony across unfenced fields and pastures. But in my day, though I sometimes took the same direct route over to what was left of Lickskillet, climbing stake-and-rider fences and crawling through gaps in thorny hedges, I usually reached this old ancestral home from Atwood — a mile or so to the southeast of it — by a road running east and west, parallel to the railroad that, just missing Mackville, had given birth to Atwood. This wagon-road, as I knew it, led past the neat gardens of our German neighbors — the Grosses, the Hassigs, the Burchers — typical German gardens with swept paths and mixed beds of flowers and vegetables. To the right, as one reached Mackville, on a slight lift in the prairie, lay the old churchyard. North of this bit of campo santo stretched a remnant of timber,

known as Kennedy's Woods: an undisturbed patch of hickory, oak, persimmon, elm, redbud, and smaller shrubs, shading a continuous mat of such wild flowers as Dutchman's-breeches, violets, jack-in-the-pulpit, bloodroot, and May-apple. In the northwest was to be seen the one rise that these typical Illinois prairies managed to make above the otherwise perfectly level horizon. Here one of the old Shonkwiler houses stood. The creek, a few hundred yards west of the burying-ground, flowed south past the railroad, half a mile below. This indolent little waterway and the cemetery road I have mentioned formed, at their intersection, the center of the Mackville of my childhood. To the west were the open prairies. To the south, the same, but with another smaller patch of timber, Gross's Woods. These latter were interesting to me because of indications there of two or three small Indian mounds. It was no doubt in and about them that another interested lad, Alfred Gross, a young prairie Audubun, developed his first enthusiasm for ornithology, which was to make him one of Atwood and Mackville's most distinguished sons. Another who frequented these groves and "opens" was my first piano teacher, Walter Easton, destined also to become an honor to his native village had not death prematurely summoned him: he now rests in the cemetery, near his old home.

This, Atwood's suburbia, constituted pretty completely my outside world until I was well into high school. My immediate world was contained within the square mile or so on which Atwood

itself stood. I remember, most vividly, an experience of my boyhood that reveals my almost perfect isolation from the world truly outside those narrow, but none the less happy, confines. I was looking down the railroad-track that, like every other route of travel in the Midwest, followed without the slightest deviation one of the four cardinal directions. None but those who have grown up in a country where west is west, north north, can realize how this condition becomes an element of one's very being. Main Street in Atwood went precisely as the North Star directed. For me, there was no East, since I lived on the western edge of town and seldom went beyond the stores on Main Street. The Drew Road, paralleling the railroad on the south, travelled westward. The Mackville road went, without a hitch, into the West. So also did the railway, down which I was now gazing. A tall, untrimmed hedge intersected these last, going as directly to the north as did its top branches toward the heavens. This hedge had always seemed a sort of Great Wall, separating Home from Beyond-Home. And now, as I sit pondering this latter realm, of deepest mystery, a train leaves Atwood, passes our place, and, as I have seen it do countless other times, goes out through the Western Gate. But this time a miracle occurs. Instead of continuing into the West, I discover, by the smoke rising above and behind the hedge, that the train has followed a sudden whim to travel, like the row of osages, into the North, disappearing, with the hedge, into the obscurity of Gross's Woods! I think no subsequent travelling, over deserts or mountains, has ever given me the intense

delight that I felt during that moment of illusion when, for the first time in my life, I seemed to see the smoke of a train travelling, not east or west, but north!

As I grew older, Mackville continued to be a sort of Midwestern Arcadia to me. When, in high-school English, I came across the word hamlet, I immediately thought of Mackville. When I read Gray's Elegy, it was of the old churchyard there that the poet had written

"The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.
...
Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

This objectification of poetic feeling, in the only environment I knew, reached its peak during my last two years in high school, when I had for companion on my walks through Mackville my English teacher, Elizabeth Churchill Hale, whose sensitiveness to beauty and impeccable good taste with respect to intellectual and aesthetic values have been an influence that has never left me through the years.

In point of fact, however, the realist in me declares that

Mackville was far from resembling an idyllic English village! With its severe architecture, it must rather have been like the stark "November Evening" of Charles Burchfield, a bleak but truthful drawing of "a typical Midwestern frontier town in the days when false-front houses were all built on one side of the road" — a picture expressing "the 'goodness and hardness' of life."* Yet, despite the total lack of architectural beauty in

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*A reproduction is to be found in Time, Dec. 24, 1934, by whose courtesy these words are used.

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its plain dwellings, the town's situation and even its unadorned properties did give it that charm that Grant Wood and his contemporaries catch for us in their work, so full of an amused realism yet so rich, too, in sympathetic appreciation of the beauty that the true artist finds in all things. At any rate, to me, who had never been out of the county, it all seemed very beautiful. And one of the reasons I now hesitate to visit that familiar spot, after an absence of twenty-five years, is that I so dread the discovery that its old burying-ground, for instance, is after all like some of the sun-scorched, unhallowed churchyards to be seen in California, where, after a full score of years, I am still a sometimes delighted, sometimes homesick tourist from Atwood — and Lickskillet — Illinois. There are times when I almost wish that the cyclone that all but wiped Mackville off the face of the earth, about 1905, had really finished the job, so that there might be no possibility of this disillusionment

from which I shrink. But this is excessive, for I am told by others who have returned to Mackville that the old charm is still there: the serenity of its little creek, the quiet of its graves.

It is sometimes my misfortune to have to live in what is modern life at almost its worst: in a California suburb. Several years at Back o' Beyond in Oregon and, perhaps more than I realize, the twenty I spent on the banks of Lake Fork, make me an ill-fit in so "civilized" a world. So that I must confess a neurotic reaction to its banalities: its air befouled by a great many too many honking automobiles; its yapping, likewise neurotic terriers, collies, and lap-dogs, their number and clamor increasing with the respectability of their habitat; one's propinquity to stupid parrots, both psittacine and human; and, last and worst, a forced sharing with bored and boresome neighbors of the day's radio broadcasts. This last and the parrot are special grievances. If the dull sleepwalkers who inflict them were capable of a moment's logic, one would like to inquire just how <u>they</u> would like to have <u>their</u> day split up by a neighbor's periodically reading to them, through a raucous megaphone, from inside a barrel, a discourse on the similarities between the Iroquoian and Algonquian languages, or on the Reconciliation of the Cosmic Paradox.

Little wonder that one's spirit, weary of this modern world, yearns for the quiet peace that I am assured is still to be found along the course of "the Lake Fork." Little wonder that the words

of Emma C. Piatt, with which this chapter opens, produce a poignant wish to lie, when the time comes, not in some urban columbarium, along with thousands of other numbered occupants, but beside "the rude forefathers" of Mackville -- symbol of the saner, more beautiful life of those who once formed that prairie Arcady.

CHAPTER XXVI

"AT THE WOOD."

My native village, Atwood, Illinois, was, in the 1870'S, a strayed bit of old Mackville. This fragment had, with the advent of the railroad, jumped from the "Skillet" into what, with its saloons, must have seemed to my gentle mother the very fires of iniquity. Or the Slough of Despond. For, in the days before Unity Township had been drained with tile manufactured by old Darius Sipe and, later, my Grandfather Merritt, the region between Mackville and Atwood might have been considered in the fringe of the Great American Bottom. Also in Unity was overflow land which I will here call "Mary's Bottom" — though her name was not Mary. When Lake Fork backed up into the cornfields of this section, wags at Atwood used to enjoy informing their neighbors, "Well, Mary's Bottom's wet!"

Of the low prairie between the two settlements, my father says: "I think they called this the 'Boss' (Levi) Budd Slough. In carrying the mail, as a boy, between Atwood and Mackville, I used to cut across this swamp — when I could!"

"In the winter, " Dodie remembers, "it was terrible. This was where your Grandpa Samson lived, later." I myself recollect its being marked, on the old map of the incorporated village of Atwood that hung in Squire Merritt's office, as the "Randall Addition."

"I guess Nobe Randall bought it," Johnnie continues, "from Boss Budd. There was several cabins on the prairie just west of the new town. Sam Fitzpatrick had one. And the Terrils, Maxeys, Richeys, and one of the Lewises. There was Ras Lewis and Bill Lewis. Bill was famous for his tall yarns. He told one about killin' nine turkeys at one shot: 'They was all settin' in a row, on the same limb. I aimed at the limb, split it, the two halves flew back together again, and caught all nine turkeys by their toes.' Ras Lewis had been wounded in the War. In the eye, I think, and the bullet was still there. He used to have sick spells and wander around the country for days."

And Dodie: "I remember how he scared Ma and us once. Pa used to keep his shotgun on forked sticks up over the door. Ras come in, saw the gun, and said, '<u>I</u> know how to use that gun.' Ma — my stepmother — was scared half to death."

Johnnie: "East of the Lewis place was the Maxey cabin. It was a two-storied, square-hewn log-house. Had a loft, with a lean-to for kitchen. Pete Maxey's wife was a Fitzpatrick. When Daddy and us moved to Mackville, from Coles County, we spent our first night with the Maxeys. I remember they made a pallet on the floor for us five children — Judy, Jane, and Riley Maxey, and me and sister Annie."

Just east of this halfway cluster of cabins was the infant village of Atwood. This new settlement had been surveyed, I believe, by the Douglas County Sarveyor, a Mr. Niles, in 1873, in which year the Indianapolis, Decatur & Springfield Railway was

built through the site of the town. In my day this was the I. D. & W. (Indianapolis, Decatur & Western) and, later, the C. H. & D. (Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton) — the "Chicken, Hash & Dumplings." In the 1890's, except for a little cinder-covered plush on the seats, there was not much difference between riding on the two regular passenger trains that ran daily in either direction and in the caboose of one of the freights in which Atwood's inhabitants sometimes rode over to Tuscola, or Hammond. The road is now, I am told, a part of the B. & O. But let us get back to the days when these Piatt and Douglas prairies were first being crossed by this new thoroughfare of wood and steel. I think much of the labor in its construction was local. A number of the workmen boarded at the home of Martin Biggs and his wife, parents of Atwood's greatly loved teacher, "Miss Lydie."

The new town developed astride the boundary between the two counties. This remoteness from the center of either division made both villages almost unique, in a day when practically every crossroads settlement was making its bid for the honor of being the county's seat of government: "Tillie Swartwout, who, at the age of three, had come across the plains with her father and mother in 1852 and settled at Placerville (California), . . . when it was announced that Placerville had won the battle, spent long hours at the gate watching eagerly for the county-seat to go by."* Atwood was not incorporated until December 14th, 1882,

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* A Golden Highway, by C. B. Glasscock, ~~(The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Indianapolis, 1934), P. 75.~~ Copyright 1934, used by special permission of the Publishers, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis. P. 75.

about two years after my parents had moved over to it from Lick-skillet.

Of its beginnings, Miss Piatt says: "Mr. Joseph Moore reports that Mr. Christopher Mossbarger was the first resident where Atwood now is. He owned a horse mill at this place and did good work in the way of grinding grain for the neighborhood. He and Mr. George Heath once laid off a town and upon Mr. Moore's laughing and asking why he did so, Mr. Mossbarger solemnly answered, 'Why, people come here. Railroads come here.' The neighbors, however, thought such was nonsense. After a town was thus laid off, it did go back for a number of years, and trees grew up again. Mr. Andrew Richey bought out the heirs of Mr. Mossbarger and still lives there.

"Atwood was laid out in 1873 on land then owned by George Nolind and Harvey Otter. In 1881 an addition was made to the town and called Randall's addition. At the time of the laying out of the town, however, this land was owned by Mr. Levi Budd.

"It was related to us that the name was given to the town by a lawyer McCoutry, and that originally in speaking of the town it was customary to say 'at the wood.' Hence the name.

"Atwood is only partly within the limits of Piatt County, a portion of it lying in Douglas County. The first house in the place was a store building, erected in August, 1873, by Richard Helton and David Barrett. They each moved a dwelling house over from Mackville, and these became the first residences of the town." Another early residence was one built by "Nat" Shonkwiler, later

the Atwood home of Joe Merritt and, for one happy year, of Johnnie's family. Indeed, this and the old Otter home are said by some to have been erected before Atwood's founding.

"L. C. Taylor was the first postmaster of Atwood; Dr. Bennefiel, now of Ivesdale, the first physician; John Lucas put up the first drug store, and Joseph Moore kept the first hotel.

"Freddie A. Richey was the name of the first child born in Atwood, and Clarence B. Snodgrass, who died Dec. 14, 1873, the name of the first person who died there.

"The members of the Christian Church erected a building, which was dedicated Aug. 15, 1880, by Rev. J. Phillips, of Graysville, Indiana, and Rev. W. H. Orr, of Philo, Illinois.

"Atwood of to-day (c. 1883) is growing rapidly. There are from fifteen to twenty business firms in the place, and new buildings are continually being erected. Over thirty new buildings were put up last year. The town contains nearly 500 inhabitants, which is twice what it contained five years ago. Atwood is in the midst of a good territory, has good people in it, and we predict that it will continue to make rapid advancement."

It did. By 1932 it had almost 700!

Although there were no saloons in Atwood when the Merritts moved there, it was not long before that industry developed. And the larger towns nearby doubtless had them. Tuscola, Douglas County's capital and metropolis, was but ten miles away. I do not know that its Elkin House or the locally historic Beach House had bars, but their dining-rooms served an abundance of food, if no liquor. Mr. Alfred Thayer, of Tuscola's Thayer House,

"would come out at noon, ring the gong, and shout, 'Dinner is ready. Roast beef, roast pork, roast mutton. Twenty-five cents. Too damn cheap, but I can't help it.'"* The Beach House continued

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*Mr. John E. Baskin, in the Tuscola (Ill.) Journal, Dec. 12, 1935.

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until 1917, when it was destroyed by fire. It had served the hungry since the early 'Sixties, when its more varied fare must have seemed something of a treat to humble travellers accustomed, in their backwoods cabins, only to "the 3 M's — meat, meal, and molasses."

*(Footnote, over)

In the Atwood Herald of November 1st, 1929, Mr. E. S. Clayton, the paper's founder, writes of the early years: "The year the Herald was established (1887) there were no saloons in Atwood, but the next year they were voted in and then the fun began. There was a certain rather lawless element, such as congregated in all small towns in those early days, and each Saturday afternoon inaugurated a riot. The main street north of the railroad would be filled with a rioting mob. There were two colored families in the town and they were nearly always mixed up in those riots, though in the main they were peaceable, well-behaved people. There was one member of the Chavours family, however, who was not so peaceably inclined. He was a son of Mr. Chavours by a former wife and not much in evidence in town except on special occasions. He was a bad man to get up against and for the most part the white scrapping element let him severely alone. He was a half-brother to Mahlen (the Herald printer's devil) and on

...molasses."*

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From an article by Paul de Kruif in ~~The Reader's Digest~~ The Reader's Digest, Sept., 1937.

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account of our friendship for Mahlen, his also was extended to the editor."

This "bad man" I remember very well. The last time I saw him, probably in the 1890's, he was drunk and attending to one of the simpler processes of nature without troubling to leave the elevated board-walks of Main Street. He may indeed have been "bad" to the more respectable, but I like to remember "Sol" as a gay and lusty character of the town and as the son of old Tom Chavours. The latter, the only Negro I ever really knew until I was grown, was engineer at the Merritt tile factory. He spent several summers there, sleeping in the attic of our house and eating at our crowded table. We children felt real affection for him, though I think we never completely forgot his color. He was an admirable fellow in many ways. It is pleasant to think that my parents' treatment of him must have been something of a solace to one who had seen his people in a bondage that the Civil War had not completely broken down. I do not know that Tom himself was ever a slave, but I know he was born at a period full of evil for his race: his son, Sol, died in 1933, aged 80; so that the elder Mr. Chavours must have been born during the earlier decades of the nineteenth century. He was an old man when I was a mere child. If Sol, too, was born in slavery, it had by no means broken his spirit.

The Herald's founder continues: "Among the saloon keepers in Atwood during the years we ran the Herald, was Fred Schimmer, Frank Legg, and C. W. Kokendorffer. The latter two, in spite of

their calling, were close and valued friends of the paper." Of the first I can only say that he sired one of the best swimmers who ever took to the waters of Lake Fork. As a boy, I used to watch Ed Schimmer remain under water until my own breathing threatened to stop, out of anxiety for this amphibian neighbor. Of Legg, my father says: "I used to go into Legg's saloon once in a while for a drink, but he would always say, 'Keep your money, Johnnie. You'll need it, with that growing family of yours.' Atwood's young blacksmith was no teetotaler, and certainly no "soak." Neither was Joe Merritt. Like many others, I suppose, he took a drink now and then between meetings of the Independent Order of Good Templars, to which he seems to have belonged. Johnnie seldom drank beyond the point of getting sick and coming home with one overshoe lost on the way.

But even this mild intemperance had, at least once, a disastrous climax. He says: "I used to take part in some of the plays they put on. We gave one that was such a success that they asked us to repeat it the following night. About closin' time, the day of the second performance, somebody come in the shop and begged me to take a drink. Out of a jug. Then he insisted I take another. Now, when you drink out of a jug, it's easy to fool yourself. Well, I closed up the shop and started for home. The farther I went, the drunker I got. By the time I reached home, I knew I was too drunk to do any actin', so I went out in the barn-lot, shooed the old cow out in the pasture, and chased her around till we was both wore out, hopin' this'd sober me up.

And, as usual, I got sick. There was no performance that night. Mom, there, felt disgraced." I think his young wife's chief objection to strong liquor — and like most of her female contemporaries, she objected very bitterly — was that it always made John sick. But neither it nor the gambling he did ever interfered with his work. He might stay out all night with "the boys," but he never failed to open up shop bright and early the next morning.

He was much more attracted to cards than to corn whisky. He was — and is — a good poker player. The spirit of the gambler is in his very marrow. Had he lived in the days of '49, he would have been one of the first to seek the gold-fields. (He still enjoys trips into those regions where panning of the alluring metal continues.) Had he been one of the pioneers of the West, he would have been one of its most energetic prospectors, but would never have neglected the gambling resorts of San Francisco's Barbary Coast -- frequented by his Uncle John Merritt — or Seattle's Horseshoe Saloon, where he would have been seen sitting in, regularly, at faro, French ("three-card") monte, chuckluck, fantan, blackjack, and, especially, poker! One of the most vivid of my recollections is the shame I felt, as a lad, for my father's habit of sneaking out with his comrades to the stumps of Gross's Woods, on Sunday afternoons, there to hornswoggle, if he could, some of the more expert, because more experienced, older players of the town. This righteous attitude of mine was quite illogical, for I had no idea <u>why</u> it was evil to play cards, but only knew,

from female elders, that it was so. This was not half so reasonable as my sister Hazel's refusing, as a girl, to join the Methodist Church unless its bishops and other dignitaries first waived in her case the ban against card-playing and dancing. Although she scarcely knew the King of Diamonds from the Queen of Hearts, and had never attended a dance in her life, she refused to condemn theoretically what she hoped some day to enjoy actually.

Yes, the young and lusty Atwood was, like Johnnie Merritt, sowing its wild oats. His wife looked down from the upstairs windows of the Merritt cottage onto the rear entrance of one of the saloons — its exit, rather, for the use of patrons who had worn their welcome out. Often, late into the night, she must look out on a row of shivering saddle-horses and whimpering dogs, and hear the profane and noisy altercations between their masters, whom strong drink had made quarrelsome. Sometimes these wrangles would be punctuated with a round of shots. And sometimes Johnnie was there, with other young bucks of the village. On one or two occasions, sitting alone with her sleeping babies, my mother's distaste for this new environment became so great that she "got her dander up" and went out to bring the young husband and father home. But I am sure this happened only once or twice, and without any Carrie Nation gesture, for she was not one to dramatize her private difficulties in a public performance of "Ten Nights in a Barroom."

Johnnie was one of the gayest of Atwood's gay young blades.

One of his friends used to declare that Jack Merritt had only to hang his trousers on the bedpost to attract the stork to his roof. Another of these cronies, upon the birth of Johnnie's tenth, Virginia — of a belated rowen crop -- made the facetious observation, "Well, John Merritt's startin' on the States." Still another old neighbor used, very innocently, to provide loafers at the shop with the same opportunity to laugh at Jack's capacities. By the time the village blacksmith had acquired a family of five boys and five girls, one of his customers, Mrs. "Joe" Wyeth, had become a lovely old grandmother of eighty years or more and a little careless with her arithmetic. When she came to the shop with the sleek old horse that she would never let anyone but Johnnie shoe, she would exclaim: "Well, Johnnie, so you have ten boys and ten girls! What a fine family!"

In order to have done with this mention of my father's youthful waywardness, let me briefly record its extension beyond mild drinking and card-playing to include pleasurable affairs with loose women of the town. He found himself, one day, much burdened with the amorous devotion of a certain one of these. And she can have been neither the first nor the last, for Johnnie was a rather handsome young devil. This I know from old tintypes and daguerreotypes I have seen and also because he was still, during my boyhood, a good-looking young fellow, with finely cut features, keen dark eyes, and black hair with just enough curl in it to go well with the crisp, closely trimmed moustache he wore. To me he has always seemed "all Merritt," though that

will mean little to any but our clan. Here the observation of Andy Merritt's Joe is interesting: "I've met a good many Merritts — dark brown-eyed ones from the northern states and blue-eyed, light complexioned ones from Georgia and Alabama." Johnnie's eyes were more than dark-brown. They were coal-black — the sort to attract other women than the one of whom we now speak.

So irksome did this affair become that Johnnie at last resolved to pull stakes and take his family to California. He sold everything and actually bought tickets for the journey. The lady who was the cause of these preparations swore to follow! Then levelheaded "Grandpa" Merritt stepped in and let fall a characteristic bit of wisdom: "Son, what you can't face and fight, you can never run away from." The Merritts unpacked. And thus ended their second abortive journey "up West." I doubt if this experience completely reformed my father. He may have taken seriously enough the advice to remain in Illinois, but it is not likely that he became a perfectly chaste husband, or that his parent suggested anything so difficult. For Joe Merritt had had his own adventures of that sort. Lest I be accused of bad taste in dwelling on these, let me only add that my admiration for both forebears is sufficient to excuse them in escapades a good deal worse than any I know them to have been engaged in.

Nor do I deplore the evil beginnings of Atwood as a whole. And they were wild ones, I am sure. They ran the complete gamut, from chronic inebriety, through rape and horse-stealing, to murder. Or perhaps I should reverse the order of the last two, for

the stealing of horses was, to my elders, the crime of crimes. This was little less true in the Middle West than in the Far West. Another Illinois "son of Vulcan," John Carr, who joined the gold rush and wrote of his experiences as miner and blacksmith in California, says:* "If two men got into trouble and one killed

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*In Pioneer Days in California (Times Pubg. Co., Eureka, Calif., 1891). P. 62. By permission of The Humboldt Times, Eureka, Calif., and George Fields, Publisher, San Francisco.

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the other in a fight, there was very little said about it; but if a man was caught stealing a horse or a mule, his days were short." Even in my own day there still existed associations for the apprehension and punishment of anyone following that profession. As early as the 1860's, Piatt says, Unity Township had its "neighborhood detective society." And it still operated as the Lake Fork Anti-Horse Thief Association as late as 1919, when, with injury to two of its members, it frustrated an attempted bank robbery at Atwood. In fact, I think it still carries on. And though eligibility for membership in such an organization sometimes became so lax as to justify its being called, by some wag, "The Fraternal Order of Vigilantes and Other Horse-Thieves," these groups were, on the whole, made up of the better class of citizens, serving a need of the times. They fostered a community respectability, even though this did frequently savor of things quite other than respectable.

As for murder, it did occur. As I have shown, one of my

Fitzpatrick relatives committed it. As the story has come down to me, this cousin of ours had warned the victim to quit trespassing over his property. When the latter repeated the offense, in a state of drunkenness, a quarrel followed in which Jim (or Mat, as he was sometimes called) fired a shot through his hostile neighbor. Fitzpatrick was exonerated, it having been shown that he shot in self-defense.

I remember what an impression it made upon my young mind to have pointed out to me, as a lad, another local murderer, who had killed a fellow townsman in a drunken brawl. He served a short sentence in the penitentiary, I believe. I remember an incident in connection. "Nobe," as we all called him, was now an old man, probably nearing eighty. Though he continued to drink, he was a man of many good qualities. One day he was working at my Grandfather Samson's when another laborer mentioned the current session of Atwood's perennial religious revival.

"Have you been saved, Nobe?"

"No. They's no hope for a man like me, I reckon."

I still recollect how I longed to tell this old penitent that, even in my then very juvenile philosophy, he stood as good a chance of eternal blessedness as most other poor mortals. My father says of him: "Nobe wasn't a bad man. Fond of his family! Why, he'd've give' up his life for his wife and children. Old Nobe was a good man."

Here I would state a personal theory that, a certain type of drama and literature notwithstanding, the moral delinquent

nowhere receives more just appraisement than by his familiar neighbors in communities like Mackville and Atwood. When, in certain Hollywood productions, I see a spinster and virgin of some American Main Street lift her skirts and give a wide berth to a fallen sister, I am tempted to write protests to the producer. Small-town tongues may indeed clack when scandal rises, for news is precious, but condemnation is, on the whole, less venomous among country people than among dwellers in cities. Though Nobe was an ex-convict and one of the local hard drinkers, he was never mistreated by his friends and was even respected by most of them. I am told that, to-day, a certain former acquaintance with a weakness for potent liquor, is nevertheless so popular at Atwood that, when in his cups, he is hidden away by the whole village, more or less, to keep him out of reach of the law. When I was in my early teens, a certain woman of easy virtue used to pass our place on her way to rendezvous with her local lover. My mother, and every other woman in the town, knew of these amours. Yet she would no more have "snubbed" Mrs. Doe than she would have insulted the worthiest matron there. I, too, knew of the lady's weaknesses, and yet, when I found a gold coin in front of our house just after seeing her return from one of her assignations, I had the gallantry to deliver it to her, without comment either to Jane Doe or to anyone else. It may seem unusual, my keeping the secret and not the coin, but it was what any other decent youth of the place would have done.

I hope I do not exaggerate the scarlet facet of life in Atwood.

The majority of its citizens, though they contacted quite intimately these matters, lived very wholesomely, attending industriously to the task of making a living for themselves and of creating healthy environments for their children. There are many names I should like to mention in this happier connection, many others perhaps no less worthy than the following: the Eastons, the Davies sisters, the Grosses, the Coddingtons, Biggses, and Marshalls.

Here is another point of difference between town and country. It has often seemed to me that, whereas in the city a man touches but a single stratum of its population -- his own, in the country he benefits from broad contact with all classes. The further back into pioneer times we go, the more we find the humblest village artisan rubbing elbows familiarly with the "better" citizens. One of the chief reasons that the career of Abe Lincoln has become the symbol of American life is that he rose to the very highest honors out of a community in which the lowliest person addressed the most distinguished by his first name. I know from my parents' reminiscences that a sound democracy was the background of life at Lickskillet, as at Abe's New Salem. And, though Johnnie and Dodie were, in the early years at Atwood, as poor as Job's turkey, this did not bar them from association with good families whose names, in part, I have just given. Yes, Johnnie Merritt's young wife soon found she had other neighbors than the poor human beings she daily saw cast out of Legg's and Schimmer's saloons.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH.

The Johnnie Merritt family, increased every two years by another son or daughter, lived in almost every section of Atwood at some period or other. At the time of my birth, we were living in the house I was later to know as Aunt Annie Sipe's. Here, in the "parlor," to which my mother had been taken because the little bed-room was too hot on this unusually warm spring day -- here, in a carpetless room, under the hanging-lamp, with its crystal pendants, near the bay-window and the new piano, I was born, the sixth of ten children.

It was near midnight of a Sunday in April. Doctor Dan Abrams was in attendance, together with some local amateurs in midwifery -- among them, Mrs. Heerdt and "Aunt" Jane Owens Helton. My mother relates: "My labor began on a Friday. We never were sure whether you were born on Sunday, the 13th, or on the 14th. I remember that Doctor Chenoweth came over from Decatur on the midnight train, and you were already born when he got there. He went to bed as soon as he arrived. When he presented his bill, Aunt Jane said, 'Well, that's the most I ever knew a man to charge for sleepin' in another man's bed.'" An accouchement in those days took on, somewhat, the nature of a social event. "We generally had a cake baked ready for the occasion," my mother says. It has always seemed remarkable to me how "Mom" retains the details of each of ten births. My father has forgotten them completely. "Why, don't

you remember we were living in the Gross house when John was born?" Dodie will remind him. Far more important to Johnnie than the cottage in which he happened just then to be sleeping, was the shop in which he spent his busy days.

One of the earlier smiths of Atwood was a Mr. T. J. Vorman. Another pioneer there was Frank Cramer, locally no less famous for his singing than for his horseshoeing. The Merritts moved their Mackville business into the old red shop at Atwood that was still in use in my own 1890's. It had been built, for an earlier artisan, by Harvey Otter. Johnnie says: "After Daddy moved his business from Mackville to Atwood, I continued to run the old Lickskillet shop for a while. Then we also moved to the new town. Maude was still a baby. We lived north of the grain-elevator. In the early days, Daddy had to get his blacksmith's-coal clear from Terre Haute, Indiana. Later, the Illinois Central brought it to Tuscola, so we had to haul it only ten miles."

The shop stood on the east side of Atwood's main street. It was built of upright planks, painted a wagon-red. In front stood no spreading chestnut but a fine maple, whose history Johnnie gives: "When that old tree was first sproutin' up, somebody — a drunk or a runaway, maybe — run over it and broke off the top. I remember Len Taylor, the postmaster, got a small keg to put around it, and filled this with dirt. And it grew." After sixty years, it still stands, I am told. Under its thick, green canopy the anvil was fired each Fourth of July. From its branches hung the kerosene torches by which the local band, on Saturday evenings

in midsummer, made out, more or less accurately, the score of "Poet and Peasant." The shop's exterior in summer and interior in winter were among the town's chief loafing places. Just across the street, in my day, was Storey's general merchandise establishment, with the huxter wagon drawn up alongside the town-pump.

Inside the shop, two forges occupied the street end, each with its hand bellows. In the center stood another pump, and I remember the strange taste of the water drawn from that well, due to the shavings and sawdust that fell through the big cracks in the plank floor. In the rear was the workshop of Will Kaiser, craftsman in wood and paint. How fascinating it was to watch him carve and delicately trim the swan's-heads with which, a true artist, he closed in the steel runners of the sleighs he and Johnnie built for the winter trade. Along the north wall was a long tool- and work-bench. I remember having always been very careful what space I chose on this, a popular resting place. Some practical joker had fixed up an apparatus by which a string at one end of the bench was made to operate an implement of torture not unlike a huge darning-needle, through a hole concealed at the other end. When some old drone of the village settled himself above this, some younger drone gave the string a sudden pull.

Another source of entertainment to the otherwise unoccupied was the wooden slake-tub. This stood near my father's forge, and almost as pleasant to us small boys as the flying sparks was the frequent immersion of red-hot iron in the water this half-barrel

contained. The trick was to wager some uninitiated youth that he could not place his foot on the rim of the tub and at the same time balance the heavy sledge-hammer just above his nose. If the joker could find a victim, the fun lay in suddenly pushing the raised foot into the water, when the sledge inevitably fell to rest on the fellow's nose. I remember it troubled me as a lad to have certain old men declare that if I left a horse-hair undisturbed in the water, it eventually became a living "hair-snake," and then have someone else assure me I was being "fed taffy." As the blacksmith's son, I was in on the hoax of sending some raw youth from the country to the Merritt shop for that venerable nonentity, a "left-handed monkey-wrench." Johnnie himself was always much too busy by day for any such tomfoolery, however willingly he may have joined his friends in similar deviltries at night.

No picture of life in early Atwood would be complete without this mention of the practical jokers so universal in those days. Every community had several. In this there were both amateurs and professionals. I think my father was only an amateur, but George Muir, his constant "pardner in crime," as Johnnie still calls him, perhaps belonged in the other class. The annals of any hamlet, I suppose, would consist largely of the tales told, by one generation to the next, of this sort of small-town horseplay. I heard many such yarns as a boy. The town's champion, perhaps, was Frank Burk. Still hale and hearty, I understand, is one of his victims,"Straw-hat' Graham. The latter I remember chiefly for his bare feet and the straw-hat he wore summer and winter. He was famed locally, too,

for his fine horses. It used to be the pleasure of Mr. Burk, when the two attended lodge together, to sprinkle the floor with carpet tacks which punctured even the calluses of Mr. Graham's feet.

The most blacksmithing that I, the third of Johnnie's five boys, ever did, was to mind the flies off the horses. This was a cruel restraint. In the first place, I was afraid some big plow-horse might step on my bare feet. Or that I might tread on a piece of hot iron, as sometimes happened. Once, I remember, I suffered a really painful burn. Too timid to tell my busy, impatient sire, I cooled my foot in the slake-tub and ran home, crying all the way. Then, too, any small boy dislikes being tied down to steady occupation, lest he miss some bit of fun. In spite of my fear of an angry parent, I usually soon managed to steal outside, to watch the bigger males of the town pitch washers or horseshoes. Or to see Uncle Elmer Merritt, back of the shop, heat a wagon tire in a circle of glowing bark, cooling it in the trough sunk into the ground for that purpose. Or in summer I might climb into some farmer's Bain or Peter Schuttler wagon, waiting repairs, and enjoy the circus posters that covered the north side of the shop. Usually I went quite beyond the shop yard. Once, I remember, to see a dancing bear that some vagabond trainer had brought to the village. And I was no less interested in the Italian than in the bear! Another time, to follow a band of gypsies, thievishly travelling about the country in their gay wagons.

I think it is Burton Rascoe who relates how, then a green country boy, he rode into the county seat, revelled in the posters

announcing the approaching circus, and returned home supremely happy in the belief that the posters were the circus! The advertising on "Poppy's" shop left me a little more sophisticated. And this reminds me: an uncle of mine, Dave Mumper, husband of Joe Merritt's "Maidie," used to tell how, when a boy in Douglas County, Illinois, living on a farm and seldom going into town, he carried about in his pocket a silver dollar someone had given him, until, despairing of a chance ever to get into town with it, he finally threw it into the creek.

I recall my first circus, which I saw, at Decatur, with my brother, Bud, and our mother. Bud and I wanted to miss nothing — not even the side-shows outside the big tent. After much pleading, my mother bought us tickets, while she waited outside for the main arena to open. I remember very well that one of the attractions of the lesser show was the famous Siamese Twins. These, naturally, interested us. But Bud and I were captivated no less by the tricks, probably not at all remarkable, of a sleight-of-hand performer. Meanwhile, the main performance began, with our anxious mother waiting outside and her two sons standing, mouths agape, watching a card trick that our poker-playing father, perhaps, could have taught us. At last Dodie was compelled to buy herself a ticket to the side-show, and snatch us away to the real circus, just as the animals were being removed from the gaze of lingering or belated spectators like ourselves.

This visit to Decatur on circus-day could not have been long after my first trip to a city and my first ride on a train. One

day an old friend and neighbor of my parents, "Whit" Reed, invited me to spend the day with him at Decatur, twenty-six miles west of Atwood. Next morning, my hand shyly placed in his, I climbed aboard "the eight-o'-clock train" and suddenly felt the very earth move from under my feet! I shall never forget that sensation. Mr. Reed had business with wholesale lumber merchants in the city, and this necessitated our crossing more railroad tracks than I had supposed existed in this world. The noise of so many locomotives was terrifying. I had never before seen more than two at the same time.

Another thing that made an indelible impression was the smell of city streets. I remember particularly how foul seemed the air that came out through the doors of corner saloons. It seemed an even greater offense to my nostrils than the stench of leaking gas-mains. I was like the Blackfoot Indian chief, Buffalo Child Long Lance, who declares, in his autobiography, that his first contact with white men nauseated him, as they had the odor to him of the unfamiliar and offensive milch cow! But the thing that stamped itself forever on my consciousness was the sense of nervous tenseness that seemed to have settled like a diabolic dust on everything within the confines of the city. Though I was but six or seven, I was grown-up enough to feel, as I left the train again at Atwood's familiar old station, that I had spent the day in a concrete hell, fascinating but horrible. I have never got over that feeling. I still find any city, if not fascinating, at least horrible. It would not be flattering to the average

city dweller to state just what are my feelings when I again join his horde after several months in the quiet, fragrant forests of Oregon. I remember that getting down from my first train ride and again setting foot on familiar soil was like coming out of a vacuum into fresh air.

And how familiar was each square foot of that intimate little world! After many years, I have only to close my eyes and pass, in spirit, down its streets to remember, after the fashion of the blind: "Here is the Reed place, with its two big elms. Here is the six-inches-deep channel of the ditch that follows Coddington's alley, and here the raised bricks in the sidewalk fronting Grandfather Samson's place, lifted two or three inches above the common level by the roots of three old maples."

And here is that other old maple in front of my father's red shop. The lot on which it stood was leased, I believe, from the new railroad for a period of ninety-nine years. And it continued to be occupied by some Merritt or other for almost half that century — long enough for a restless American family to remain in one spot. Here, during many years, Johnnie spent practically his every waking hour.

For it was a rare treat when our young father passed a leisurely ten minutes with us children. Once in a great while he would take time to place the current infant on his knee and, to the delight of us all, sing

"O Charlie is a nice young man,
O Charlie is a dandy.
But Charlie likes to kiss the girls
Whenever they come handy.

I won't have any your weev'ly wheat,
I won't have any your barley,
I want the very best you've got,
To make a cake for Charlie."

On still rarer occasions, he would tell us some swashbuckling story (his favorite novelist is now Sabatini) and, just as he brought us to a still uncertain climax, would begin: "And they came to a little brook, and the Captain of the horse-thieves began to sing

"The lobster in the lobster-pot,
The blue-fish in the brook.
I dare not tell, and you know not,
The love I have for my sweet Mary Ann.'"

This was our cue to fall upon our perverse young parent, beat him, and maul him, begging meanwhile for "More!" The song of the lobster-pot was Johnnie's signal that he had no more time to fool away with mere offspring. There was no telling how many embattled farmers were being delayed this minute by a broken reaper and the need of his expert and popular services as the village blacksmith.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BOY'S PARADISE.

The earliest of our Atwood homes of which I have any personal recollection was the old house at the extreme west end of town where we lived while Joe and Johnnie Merritt owned the Atwood Brick and Tile Factory.

The manufacture, from local clay, of brick and, especially, tile had been an important industry in Illinois and neighboring states. For it took many miles of four-, eight-, and twelve-inch tile to drain that portion of the Mississippi basin of its surplus water and thus rid it of its ague and fever. The Merritts, at no great financial benefit to themselves, had a part in the tail-end of that industry. For by 1910 our community was so well tiled that, in driving about the countryside, one was apt to pass one or two deserted factories, their long, wooden sheds falling to pieces, their kilns caving in, and the pits from which the clay had been dug now useless for farming and given over to dogfennel and Jimson weed.

My father and grandfather were successors to the original owner, Darius Sipe. That old Pennsylvania "Dutchman," by the way, once stimulated my interest in American history — in the days when I thought that came from but one source: dull school texts. He told me that, as a boy, he had known an old Negro who boasted having once held George Washington's horse for him. There is not

much new history in this, but I have always liked it, as a living link between 1776 and the early 1900's.

I thank the kind providence that arranged that I should spend my first years in such a place as that factory and adjoining farm. And I pity nephews and great-nephews whom I see growing up on the streets and vacant lots of cities and their suburbs. For the reader must not suppose that "The Tile Factory" or "The Tile Yard," as we called it, was in the least like a manufactory in some smoky, crowded industrial city. In the first place, it stood just beyond the town, with open prairie to the west. It was, for any child, and particularly for any boy, a real paradise.

Its center was the engine- and machine-rooms, the latter being the place where the moist, pungent clay was converted into smooth brick and tile. There were by-products, too, fashioned by the creative hands of us children: mud dolls, animals, miniature houses. These were later baked, with the legitimate output, in the three big kilns. In the engine-room presided Uncle Tom Chavours, the old Negro whom I have mentioned in a previous chapter. He it was who discouraged, in his gentle manner, our playing too near the big flywheel and other dangerous machinery. We needed no such warning with regard to the flywheel, for it had once hurled itself, in great and deadly arcs, in all directions, threatening to kill everyone present, but miraculously injuring no one. I think that to me the true center of this throbbing world of belts, boilers, and clanking gear was the governor, which, in my earliest years, I misunderstood to be a sort of revolving <u>material</u> intelligence

that kept the whole establishment running. Another interesting place was the water-tank, above the boiler-room. Into this oily pool we boys used to jump at the close of day, while the water was still lukewarm.

Radiating from the big central room of the factory were three long sheds, in which the tile and brick were stacked to dry before "burning." During the working season, entrance to these sheds was forbidden us children, but at other times their dark, damp lengths were our favorite rendezvous. Down the center of each ran a track, perhaps a yard wide, over which the soft brick and tile were transported to available racks. These three tracks met at a common terminal and thus we boys had quite a length of travel-way for the long flatcars which we rode up and down, up and down, until called away from these dangers by an anxious mother. When the factory was not running, the blacksmith-shop, "up town," held our father, who did not know whether we indulged this forbidden pleasure or not.

There was great fun to be found outside, too. It was pleasant to hobnob with male elders, as they dug clay from the pits, or to ride with one of them on the two-wheeled carts that carried it to the factory. I still remember some of the old horses that pulled those carts — old "Q," old Selim. There were a number of "Selims" in our neighborhood in those days, as I see by "Squire" Merritt's record of strayed and stolen animals. Were these the vaunted but questionable progeny of some famous stallion? Surely <u>our</u> Selim was no aristocrat!

And our two dogs, Ben and Gynt. Since becoming a bit more of a reader than I then was, I have often pondered how we came by that literary name for our dog. No one in our household, surely, had any great knowledge of Ibsen or Grieg. What a day of horrors for us was that when we children saw the apparently mad but no less loved Gynt being pursued with a gun by a reluctant Uncle Claude! But our grief at Gynt's death was small compared with our loss of old Ben. I have since wondered of what breed Ben was. He was an immense fellow, with shaggy fur of almost pure white. He was like a big blond Newfoundland. We children adored him. He had once been the watchdog of Aunt Annie Sipe, who recalls: "Once Rob and I had been on a visit at Aunt Booge Conley's, down in Coles County. Old Ben, then a young dog, followed our buggy on our way back to Atwood. I remember I threw him some of Booge's biscuits. He followed us all the way home and was ours from then on." One terrible night, after having him with us for many years, our mother discovered the old fellow dragging himself home through the snow, almost helplessly paralyzed. Next morning he was dead. This was genuine tragedy. No other animal ever had so big a place in my affections, not even Selim, or Charlie, the gay little Indian pony who provided us so many jolly rides in the phaeton of our beloved friend and neighbor, Mr. "Coddy" — Ellery Coddington, for whom I feel honored to be named. And now it was sad, indeed, to be putting our faithful Ben under the frozen ground. This was quite another matter from the interring of dead chickens, birds, and the like in our little play-cemetery. My partner in this latter

occupation was a favorite cousin, Bonnie Mumper.

Of the numerous amenities that made this home a child's Utopia, none attracted my own nature more than the activities about the three beehive kilns in which the brick and tile were burned. The chief charm of the burning lay in its being continued through the long summer nights, when my father and Uncle Elmer took turns stoking the coal fires. These, open from the outside, made a picturesque spot of the east end of the factory. Supper over, our mother and some of her seven or eight children would walk down to the kilns, to visit the stoker. I remember, too, a few gala occasions when friends from town came out for an evening watermelon feast or on a moonlight picnic around the fires. I remember, too, lying in bed and listening to the plaintive music of my father, who used to play his baritone late into the night, to keep himself awake. What an enchanted place does that old Tile Yard seem to me now, furnishing us children, year after year, its seasonal round of delights, as if the entire establishment were there for our particular enjoyment. The only time when this was not so was in midwinter, when the long empty sheds were places to be run past at night, especially since the pigs often slept there and made strange and terrifying noises as we flew past.

Nor was the adjoining farm itself any less alluring to us boys and girls. During the spring plowing, we gathered arrowheads. In midsummer there was wading, fishing, and swimming in the creek

that bordered the "west forty" — flowing south from Mackville. During dog days, Lake Fork was somewhat as Senator Thomas Hart Benton described the Missouri River: "a little too thick to swim in, and not quite thick enough to walk on."*(Footnote,over) In winter, there was skating along the creek and bottoms. Of the farm, the spot where I liked most to play was the big barn, with its lofty haymow. Here, with Bud and the Marshall twins — our inseparable companions, we used to mount the big beams above the hay and play "Jack and the Beanstalk." The soft hay served as a comfortable landing for the fleeing Jack and as a realistic but not quite deadly one for the Giant.

I see every square foot of the yard and garden surrounding our house. West of the kitchen was a low-spreading apple tree. In its shade grew a syringa. At the north entrance to the house stretched a patch of uncut bluegrass. To the east stood two rose bushes, never trimmed. One was, in May or June, a mass of small, red blooms. The other was an old-fashioned brier with flowers of richest yellow. In a corner of the garden was a thicket of blueberries, where my sisters had their play-house. Against the picket fence grew a row of sweet william. Scattered here and there were beds of whatever flowers our mother found time to rescue from encroaching grass and weeds. Iris, peonies, and other plants were protected more or less effectively from children, dogs, calves, and Plymouth Rock hens by a border of four-inch tile, from the factory. Here and there was a patch of dogfennel, plantain, or ragweed, untouched by spade or hoe. Around the barn lived hundreds

...to walk on."* In winter ...

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*Quoted in The Sod-House Frontier: 1854-1890, by Everett Dick (D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc., N. Y., 1937). P. 6.

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of rats and mice and a dozen cats. In the garden, now and then, a snake was seen, none the less terrifying to barefoot boys and girls for being harmless.

Our dwelling, at the Tile Yard, was one suited to the play needs of so many children. The ground floor was a series of rooms stretching in an uncertain line from "the parlor" and "the north bedroom" to the "summer-kitchen" on the south. I remember sleeping but once or twice in this "spare bedroom," but the experience was mystic: the ceiling was covered with a cerulean wallpaper, sprinkled with golden stars, big and small. It seemed like sleeping out of doors. The partition between parlor and sitting-room was a series of folding doors which, when closed one against the other, like a fan, formed a single room. Another door that was a joy to us children was that between sitting-room and "the east room." This was, like a barn door, sawed into halves, so that either might be opened separately. The lower portion provided a swinging gate on rainy days, when our mother was not watching. In the east room one or two of the younger children were born. It served as hospital for all serious illnesses. It was the brightest room in the house, having double windows in its east wall. Here stood, in winter, a wire flower-rack, holding Dodie's potted geraniums and begonias. I remember particularly the fragrance of blooming freesias. It was in this room that my mother nursed several of us through typhoid fever. Bud was among these. It happened that, while he was quite ill and a little delirious, we were having some butchering done in Atwood. Bud asked for the tails

of the slaughtered porkers. Mother explained that it was night, that he should have them next day. But Bud refused to wait. To quiet him, an older brother had to tramp into town, get the butcher out of bed, and place a dozen pigtails by the side of the invalid, whereupon he immediately grew better.

West of this room was the low-ceilinged kitchen, with its crooked, neatly papered chimney. I think it must have been of this chimney that some local mason is said to have boasted: "She's plumb, all right. She's so plumb that she leans a little to the north." I distinctly remember various little ledges up and down its height on which rested medicine bottles, vases, children's toys and other small articles. Outside the kitchen door, on a tall, sturdy pole, was a farm-bell which I remember never to have heard ring except on those rare occasions when my mother's absence made it possible for us boys to pull the rope, against strict orders. Sloping from the low eave of the kitchen was a grape-arbor, from which hung great purple bunches of Concords. Underground, with a slanting, outside door, was a cavernous cellar, with brick floor.

The half story above the main portion of the house was dormitory for us boys. My own bed, in summer at least, stood near the south window, and one of my pleasantest recollections is that of lying, half asleep, watching the moon hide and reveal itself among the clouds. This south window reached almost to the floor. Thus, on hot summer nights, we were able to place our improvised pallet all but out of doors. In winter we boys fought for the place nearest the brick chimney that went up through our sleeping

quarters from one of the several stoves below. To him who seized this place before the others, belonged the coveted privilege of lying with his buttocks braced against the warm bricks. It was quite a problem to effect this for we younger ones had not the courage to go upstairs alone, past the tiny door that opened into the space beneath the sloping roof. This, a sort of unfinished attic, though it might be explored by day, was a dark and fearsome place at night.

I have purposely waited to describe the parlor, not because much of our time was spent there, but because it has to do with an important aspect of my family's history: our love of music. Here stood our little New England piano. A Tour Through Indiana in 1840, by John Parsons.* (Footnote, over) tells of the journey of one of that state's first pianos from Philadelphia ~~New York or Boston, I think,~~ to New Orleans, up the Mississippi, the Ohio, and, finally, the Wabash, to the pioneer settlement of its owner. Here, while being unloaded, after so long a ride without mishap, it fell into the river — being safely rescued, however. Though our little ebony instrument had had no such career, the story of its purchase is worth telling. My father bought it shortly before my birth. Into one of our earlier homes it had been brought, when there was not even a rag-carpet on the floor. My parents had paid for it with produce: a couple of young sows, chickens, eggs, and milk. But by the time I was able to climb to the iron-legged stool in front of it, my mother had all of the floors covered. The parlor had a "store" carpet, the others being homemade ones, woven of rags. Under each

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...Parsons,..

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*P. 214.

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was a layer of straw, placed there at spring and autumn house-cleaning. Besides the piano, there was one other article in this room that impressed me tremendously: a picture of an old horse, locked out in a most terrible blizzard. What heartaches did that scene cause me!

On top of the little black piano there was likely to be a horn of some kind. For every generation of Merritts of which I have much knowledge had its several amateur musicians. Although not one of us has ever distinguished himself in the art, almost every Merritt included in this record seems to have been born with music in his nature. Grandfather and his brothers had it, though they never developed it beyond the skillful fiddling of Uncle Andy and the passion for rhythm that possessed his invalid brother, "Check," the family's snare-drummer. I remember Check very well. An illness had left him with the mind of a child, but it had not deprived him of his love of rhythm. This he indulged by the hour, if the household could endure it, his instrument being a resonant coal scoop, if nothing better was at hand. From the time Great-uncle Andy had gone, with his family and his fiddle, down into Texas, soon after the Civil War, Illinois Merritts were all but completely out of touch with the Andy group until the family re-corder recently located Andy's children there. And in an early letter from one of them, Joe, were these words: "Are you Illinois Merritts still musical? I've never known a Merritt that wasn't, in some way. My father, before his early death, was schoolteacher and master in the local (Wise County) pioneer singing-schools. He

always had his fiddle handy and his tuning fork in his pocket." Great-uncle Sam had a "singing-class," too, and his children were quite musical. One of the boys played the ocarina and, I have been told, produced really good music from that instrument. My mother remembers a picnic, held in the woods of Indiana, just over the Illinois line, at which Sam's Emory quite bewitched his musical cousins with his playing.

Joe's children, likewise, were all blessed with a talent and love for music. Joe himself must have felt a closeness to the muse when he named one of his sons "Orpheus." This gesture brought the child no special blessing from the gods and may, indeed, have displeased them for Orpheus died after but a month's sojourn on this earth. Johnnie had his full share of musical enthusiasm. He had a pleasant tenor voice and, besides having a few lessons on his mother's organ, ~~-- the first, perhaps, in Mackville --~~ learned to play one or two band instruments. All of Johnnie's boys and girls sang and played. The girls, particularly, had good voices and one of the boys is deeply musical, only the demands of other interests having kept him from developing his really considerable skill and feeling as a pianist. There is, in the author's possession, a snapshot of a gathering of Merritts at my grandfather's old home, in Atwood, showing a band, of twenty-five or thirty members, formed in a perfectly impromptu manner, and made up entirely of cousins, uncles, brothers, and sisters. Though no masterly symphonic group, it was no worse -- if no better -- than the typical small-town band

of its day. Indeed, it was almost identical with the Atwood band, that used to give summer concerts there: the Overture to William Tell, Sousa's marches, and Suppé's Light Cavalry, all very badly done, no doubt! These concerts were attended by the entire countryside (with the lone exception, it seemed to me, of my tired mother), and were enjoyed especially by young bucks from the near-by farms, sporting new rubber-tired buggies, by which to allure their neighbors' marriageable daughters. Rehearsals for these concerts took place, strangely enough, in the "city" jail. In the same building the town board still meets, now presided over, as this is being written, by Uncle Zeph Merritt, "mayor" and trombonist.

At one time Atwood boasted a band made up entirely of young women. Through its more than local fame romance came to some of the members. Their picture, appearing in a certain musical journal, caught the attention of a military band in the Philippine Islands, with the result that several of the girls carried on a correspondence with as many musical soldiers stationed there. Among the latter was a young Californian who, upon discharge from the Army, came to Atwood and married the band's baritone player, my sister Hazel. To them belongs the credit of our family's ultimate move to the Pacific Coast. They were the first of us to settle permanently in California.

But San Francisco was, to us children, still only a dot on our school geographies during that last decade of the nineteenth century, when about the only geography we actually knew was the long mile between the Tile Factory and the school at Atwood. Half

a mile east, on the way to town, Grandfather Merritt lived. This place, too, was almost a farm. As Grandfather grew older, he became less the blacksmith, more the farmer. Here he spent all but his last years, here my grandmother passed away. It was a beautiful place, surrounded by garden, orchard, and meadow, a fitting reward for their many years of labor. One of the happiest periods of my life was that spent, after Grandmother's death, in this old place.

With these two farms and the Tile Yard over which to roam, small wonder that I now remember so little that was other than happy of my life there. Or that to-day, when Joe Merritt's little great-grandson, Peter, bored with the "funnies," city-lot banditry, and other such amusements, begs me to go for a walk with him, I long to take him to some of the places that made up my own charmed world at his age. To the big cornfield, where one could get delightfully "lost." To the redhaw tree where, if the pigs had not just feasted, he might fill his tummy and his pockets with the fruit. Over to see Fred and Paul, Uncle Elmer's boys. Or, if Mommy consented, even to the creek, there to explore its varied life — world without end!

CHAPTER XXIX

"THE SQUIRE."

I remember my Grandfather Merritt not as the village blacksmith — my father had become that — but as the small farmer and local Justice of the Peace. The whole village now addressed him as "Squire" and spoke of him to others as "the Squire." The title was perfectly democratic and connoted not in the least what it might suggest to an Englishman. When Grandfather walked along Atwood's main street, in exactly the same garb he wore to hoe his garden in, he was greeted with a "Howdy, Squire" from all whom he passed.

I have often felt that he and, perhaps, many contemporary justices were potential Abe Lincolns. I believe Joe Merritt might have become an able lawyer. He was, actually, the typical rural Justice of the Peace — a true type of "Americanism on the hoof," to borrow a phrase from Robert P. Tristram Coffin. "Grandpa" had little or no formal education, yet he possessed unusual native apprehension and good judgment. I am glad to have witnessed, as a boy, those homely scenes of justice over which he presided, if not with academic astuteness, with something much finer: sympathetic understanding of the weaknesses and the strengths of human personality. It may have seemed a bit ludicrous to hear witnesses sworn in by my grandfather, a cud of tobacco tucked more or less out of the way of the hastily spoken words "D'you solemnly swear

tstell the truth, the whole truth, an'nothing but the truth, s'helpyouGod?" But there was dignity enough in his decisions, based as they were on simple, unadorned justice. He held the post for many years, evidently to the satisfaction of most of his neighbors, who admired his high sense of fairness and his method of settling difficulties by the simple application of "horse-sense."

For in Joe Merritt's day and environment many of the difficulties between neighbors were settled "without taking out a writ for tort, theft, or trover." There still lingered something of the ancient equity described in Constance Lindsay Skinner's Pioneers of the Old Southwest* "The community moral code of the

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*Pioneers of the Old Southwest: A Chronicle of the Dark and Bloody Ground (Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1920). P. 44. Vol. 18, "The Chronicles of America." By permission of the Yale University Press.

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frontier was brief and rigorous. What it lacked of the 'whereas' and 'inasmuch' of legal ink it made up in sound hickory." Joe Merritt never applied a "pohickory" switch as punishment in his court, but he could be "brief and rigorous" when that did not hinder justice.

Typical of its period — the 1850's — is the following from C. B. Glasscock's A Golden Highway*: "Solomon himself could have

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*P. 284.

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done no better than did Alcalde Sullivan with the first case brought before him in Columbia," historic old mining camp of California. "William Smith accused Juan Santa Anna of stealing a pair

of leather leggins, and demanded justice from the alcalde. Sullivan said the case was trivial and he would not bother with it. Smith insisted. Very well, said the alcalde, if you want justice you shall have it. When the witnesses had been heard, Sullivan fined the Mexican three ounces (of gold) for stealing the leggins, and fined the American one ounce for bringing the complaint."

Squire Merritt's court was a natural point of appeal for fair treatment by others because the Squire himself was a just, an understanding neighbor, and because he possessed natural, spontaneous judgment in matters of everyday living. His code was that of Andrew Jackson, who once instructed a jury: "Do what is right between these parties. That is what the law always means." Again, with Judge Jackson, the Squire at Atwood could say, "I may not know as much law as there is in Bacon but I know enough not to take illegal fees!"* Another of Jackson's biographers, James Parton,

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* Andrew Jackson: The Border Captain, by Marquis James. Pp. 45, 47.

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says that his "decisions were short, untechnical, unlearned, sometimes ungrammatical, and generally right."* So also were Joe Merritt's.

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* Life of Andrew Jackson, by James Parton. Vol. I, p. 227.

And those of one of the very earliest justices in Piatt County, "Uncle" Dan Harshbarger, who served his community for a dozen years "until they began lawing," when he refused to be entangled in the chicaneries of professional legalists. Uncle Dan, Miss Piatt records, was considered one of the best peacemakers in the county.

On my desk lies one of the ponderous Justice's Dockets of my

grandfather, dating from 1876 to 1891. It seems precious to me for many reasons, among them this: it is symbolic of the truly democratic nature of pioneer American institutions and, therefore, of special value in these present days when one wonders whether democracy can survive our increasingly complex ways of life. It is no longer ago than our grandfathers' youth that one might see even some of our state legislative bodies at work with as little artificial ceremony and formality as in Joe Merritt's little court. In 1849 an observer saw the Missouri legislators eating their lunch of cornbread and bacon in the Hall of the House of Representatives and rolling up at night in their buffalo robes. Seven or eight years ago, with a group of typical Oregonians, I spent a Sunday on the lawns of the picturesque old state Capitol at Salem, Oregon — to me, one of the last strongholds of democracy, and of natural living. Our lunch eaten, we sauntered, unattended and unhindered, through the dignified halls of the state's legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Finding ourselves in the Senate Chamber, alone but for the portraits of former governors, one of the young high-school girls of our party mounted the rostrum, seized the speaker's gavel, brought the impromptu assembly to order, and began, significantly: "We, the People of these United States . . . !" When, more recently, I read of the burning of the old Capitol, I wondered if its destruction was not as symbolic of ineluctable change as was our taking over its functions, that day, symbolic of old ways which, it seems to me, we should hesitate to discard without much thoughtful deliberation.

These faded pages, in my grandfather's handwriting, inspire my

respect for being, also, a typical cross-section of average American life. Someone has declared that lynching is as American as apple pie. So also was the justice's court that, sooner or later, on every American frontier, took over the prerogatives of the bastard justice of Squire Lynch. These records kept by Atwood's Justice of the Peace and Police Magistrate, like countless thousands more written down through the years in every town and hamlet of America, constitute an unintended saga of our land. Though they mention no wars and record no international alliances, they form a continuous picture of the lives of those men and women who fashion and perpetuate nations. It may be that one of these pages refers to nothing of greater international importance than the fact that "the following described Property to Wit one Gray Horse four years old about Fifteen 15 hands high" has strayed onto the lands of a neighbor. But between the lines of such entries one reads whole chapters of the American scene — of the old American scene.

Sometimes, too, one need not look between the lines to see unfold a simple drama. I quote from one such page: "State of Illinois, Piatt County. Lucinda W. Hughs vs. _____, Before J. W. Merritt, J. P., on Replevin, 1877. Lucinda W. Hughes being duly Sworn doth depose and Say that She is entitled to the following goods and chattells To wit One red Cow and Calf the Property of her late husband desceased Thomas Hughs and that said goods are of the value of Thirty dollars. That on the 25th day of Oct., 1877, one _____ wrongfully took and wrongfully detains the Said goods and chattels from this affiand. Whereupon a Writ of replevin was issued and delivered to Const. Linton to Serve," etc.

The "affiand" in this case was friend and neighbor to the Merritts not only at Atwood (specifically, at the nearby "Chicken-bristle" settlement) but also, many years later, to the California branch of our family. From the grandchildren of the late Lucinda Hughes Shalburg, I have the completed story. The then Mrs. Hughes, at a critical point in the trial, seized a poker from under the Squire's potbellied stove and, brandishing it, if not at the Court, at Joe Merritt personally, threatened to take matters into her own hands if justice was not immediately rendered her. And it was — though I feel sure that her cow and calf were restored not because of Joe's fear of a poker, but because of his sense of fairness and his admiration of feminine courage. Until her recent death, Mrs. Shalburg's sturdy spirit was always welcomed by us California Merritts, glad to enjoy again, through her, something of the pioneer atmosphere of earlier days in Illinois.

Stealing a cow was a serious offense, but the theft of a horse was, in those days, much graver, as I have shown. In Grandfather's records I find many instances of the caution men took to declare publicly the presence on their property of an estray: it was dangerous to do otherwise, and run the risk of being pronounced a horse-thief by the local group who made it their business to punish that unpardonable offense. In Miss Piatt's book I read of one such organization functioning in our county as early as 1831, taking the condemned for a ride astride a walnut rail. Several years later, the self-styled "Calithumpians" were applying tar and feathers in the same noble cause. The theft of harness was another major crime, even in my own day, when this traditional tabu

had become a somewhat illogical habit, scarcely justified as it had been in earlier years. I wonder if this was not merely an unreasoned survival from earliest pioneer times, when a man's dependence upon, and consequent loyalty to, a neighbor made the stealing of that neighbor's horse or harness one of the most heinous of crimes. I remember the amused whisperings that circulated through a certain rural community in the West when it was discovered, in comparatively recent years, that a theft of some shabby old harness belonging to one of the citizens had been committed by the son of a pompous past-president of the local Association for the Prevention of Horse-Stealing, an organization then on its last legs. But this would have been no laughing matter in earlier decades.

Most of the pages of this old Docket Book are records of attempts to collect bad debts. And many of these end with the statement "No property found." This may sound amusing from the distance of intervening years but it was often, no doubt, very tragic both to plaintiff and defendant. Even the faithful doctors of the village sometimes resorted, likewise in vain, to the law to obtain payment for cold, dangerous night rides into the surrounding country.

Less prosaic matters, too, are here. One page relates how certain roistering young bucks of the village "did on Aug. 10, 1878, disturb a worshipful assembly . . . by loud and profane swearing and useing obscene language and also running horses on the public hiway." Another tells how one of the women of the town "did unlawfully strike the head and wound a minor child with a Stick."

In addition to those cases which the city's legitimate traffic in liquor brought the Squire, there was an occasional difficulty over "moonshine," as when one of the saloon keepers accused an old poker partner of Johnnie Merritt's of selling corn whisky without a license. Such cases must have been freely discussed beyond the walls of the Justice's dusty little office.

So also would be the following one: "The complaint of _____, an unmarried woman, . . . who Says that She is now pregnant with a child and that the Said child is likely to be born a bastard and that one _____ is the Father of Said child." Likewise, the case of one of Joe's -in-laws, accused and convicted of assault upon one of the women of the town — evidently one of the loose women of the town, else surely the Magistrate would have imposed more than the "three dollars and costs" recorded. (Joe Merritt may have had a more than official acquaintance with the plaintiff!) But most of the Squire's cases were less sensational. That this and a certain other suit were exceptional, is indicated by the considerable stuttering Joe's pen did in recording them. In the second instance: "John Doe did in upon Jane Fulano unlawfully did make an Assault with intent her the said Jane against her forcibly to ravish and Carnally know and Prays he be therefore dealt with according to law." And there follows further stammering. Joe was obviously excited.

During the earliest years of Joe Merritt's service, Atwood was a pretty wild place. It must have been in one of its saloons that a certain young citizen attacked another with a billiard cue.

This cost the defendant "three Dollars and cost of Suit taxed at $6.90." There was then in and about Atwood a rough gang not unlike the Clary's Grove boys whom Abe Lincoln subdued at New Salem. Joe's accounts of some of the scrapes these fellows got into indicate that they disdained the use of any billiard cue. The charge in one such case is that one "George Blank did make an assault and with his hands then and there beat bruise wound and injure the plaintiff, and further that Jim Blank, brother to the said George, did make an assault with hands and feet and there beat kick and injure" the same poor victim. (George and Jim were mollycoddles not to "gouge," as doubtless did their pappy and their grandpappy.) The decision was that this kind of fighting put the defendants in the twenty-five dollar class.

In the back pages of Grandfather's old book are statements of various chattel mortgages, such as the following: "From William M. Sanders To William Wright, the following described Property to Wit: One Gray horse 9 years old blind in both eyes named Charley; one red Cow 5 years old name Jude; One black and White Spotted Cow 5 years old named Pied, for the Sum of thirty dollars," etc. Frequently, the Squire uses that quaint early-Americanism, "pieded."

I have said that my grandsire's English, if no better, was not much worse than Andrew Jackson's. Certainly he does make errors: "felloneously," "verdick," "garnisheas," "malitious." Frequently the Squire made the spelling of a word much more difficult than it needed to be, but sometimes he simplified it, though seldom to the degree discovered in Parton's biography of Jackson,* which, quoting

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*Vol. I, p. 137.

from old court records of West Tennessee, gives the phonetic gem "anorher," for another. Often the charm of an unconscious use of obsolescent forms is a double one. There may be historical continuity when Joe writes, as a Virginian, that he is "Southren Bred." The latest Webster still gives the similar form southron. It is interesting to reflect that it may be not bad spelling but a case of the survival of obsolete English forms in the American backcountry when the Squire uses such a variant as "Pettit," and "Scira facia" for scire facias does not seem such terrible Latin to Joe's grandson, who must here confess that not he but Mr. Webster makes the correction. (And Joe had not studied Caesar and Cicero, either.) At any rate, obsolescent versions give beauty to these old pages, as does the use by my grandfather, as late as 1882, of the form ſſ for double s.

One cannot help wondering just what passed in Joe Merritt's mind as he wrote, on July 8th, 1877, in rather fancy script, the name of one of his mother's relatives, "Samuel Fitzpatrick, his mark," and directed this illiterate cousin to make a cross beside it. But one knows that Joe was not the man to be vain of this advantage over a kinsman. The incident probably did no more than bring to the Squire's mind the Merritt-Fitzpatrick journey from Virginia to the Illinois outlands: there were many of Joe's contemporaries besides Cousin Sam who had to sign their names with that ancient symbol.

The fact of the Squire's being a blood relative to the defendant in a case would never have lessened his determination to

study that case with equity to both sides. His own son, Claude, was once brought before him on a charge of assault and battery and given a fine of five dollars and costs! And, as Claude himself relates, with that long, low chuckle that is a Merritt characteristic, "Daddy, of course, had to pay the fine. My only punishment was being told I was no 'count." Since this could be done, in Claude's case, in the Merritt home, it was not necessary for the Squire to adjourn court for that purpose, following the precedent of old Squire Yates, Justice of the Peace at Fiddletown, California, in the days of gold, who, when he knew a witness to be lying, adjourned court to tell him, in lay profanity, just what he thought of liars.

I am able to conjure up the more easily these earlier sessions of Grandfather's democratic court-in-shirt-sleeves, for having myself attended later ones — in the 'Nineties. I used often to visit that dusty, shabby little hall of justice, both during its sessions and when no one but the Squire was there, and he asleep. At such times I would now and then rummage about in drawers and boxes, fascinated by musty deeds, mortgages, and other old documents. Grandfather's sanctuary must have seemed a most untidy place to his wife and daughters, when they visited him there. It is but just to add, however, that it was not quite so ill kept as the old log courthouse at Nashville, Tennessee, described by Parton[†]: "On one occasion . . . a lawyer arose and addressed the honorable court as follows: 'May it please your honors, it is a rule of equity that every suitor shall come into court with a clean shirt-tail. Without unnecessary offense to the

majesty of law, the ermine of the judges, or purity of anybody, I defy suitor or advocate, much more the honorable court, to maintain pure thoughts and white linen in such a sheep-fold and pigsty.'"*

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* Parton's Andrew Jackson. Vol. I, p. 138.

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In a setting as democratic as the court at Atwood, where plaintiff, defendant, and witnesses usually knew the presiding official as "Joe," one of the difficulties of his office must have been that of maintaining at least a semblance of dignity. I doubt if any lawyer ever had the temerity to tell the Squire his spittoon needed fresh sawdust, but I dare say some bit of horseplay was now and then injected into the proceedings. Glasscock* relates

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* A Golden Highway. P. 163.

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an amusing instance of such tomfoolery in the old mining town of Downieville, California: "In 1850, when a man was convicted there of stealing a pair of boots, he was sentenced to return the boots and treat the crowd. In the party which followed he stole the boots again and disappeared with all his possessions. The judge who sentenced him had to pay the bar bill."

I think my grandfather might have served his community in some more important capacity than that of Justice of the Peace. He was once urged, in fact, to run for the post of Sheriff of the county, but never became a candidate. As Johnnie explains: "Our end of Piatt was already heavy with men looking for jobs and the

Republicans thought it wouldn't be wise to submit another name from Unity Township." But I doubt if Grandfather had the political ambitions necessary for election, or all the abilities needed. My mother adds: "Grandpa could talk, but he couldn't make a good speech. He spit and spluttered too much."

And now let us take a look at the Squire's household. By the time I was born, most of my aunts and uncles were married, though all living at Atwood, where I saw them daily. Only my two youngest uncles, Claude and Zeph, were still with their parents. When I once asked my father how Claude Melnotte got his name, he replied, "Oh, Daddy had been readin' another book," and I remembered having seen, as a high-school lad, on the Squire's shelves, along with histories of the Civil War, Lady of Lyons and other volumes by Bulwer-Lytton.

By 1900, my grandfather had greater leisure to know his grandchildren than while his immediate progeny were growing up. I think the spirit of the clan was always exceptionally strong in him. It meant a great deal to have Merritt blood in one's veins. It was always with the manner of the patriarch that he addressed us, his grandchildren, with an affectionate "Hello, son," or "There you are, daughter." I like to remember a little occurrence of my ninth or tenth year. A circus came to Atwood. And the reader will easily imagine the size of any circus that visited this village of seven hundred souls. Grandfather gave permission to raise the tent on a corner of his farm, receiving several passes in payment. Cousin Bonnie, my sister Hade, myself, and other youthful Merritts were to attend. But some untoward circumstance caused the manager to

cancel the engagement: there would be no performance. One of the granddaughters, probably Hade or Bon, set up a wail. Joe Merritt became at once Squire Merritt, Justice of the Peace and Police Magistrate. There should be a performance. And there was. With only Grandpa's long legs and a dozen pairs of shorter ones dangling from the best seats. As I remember the incident, I still feel the pride I experienced as we trotted homeward, hard at our grandsire's heels. In spite of the difficulty of keeping up with his long strides, supremely happy were we all: a whole circus had performed at the command, and for the exclusive pleasure, of The Merritts!

I remember feeling the same childish vanity for my clan in the fact that the Atwood ball park was located, for several years, on one of Grandfather's pastures. To this the entire village — men, women, and children — came, filled with patriotism for the home team and an almost feud-like hatred of visiting teams. There was a special rivalry in those days between Atwood and Arthur, the village to the south of us. In autumn, football too was played on the same pasture. It was not only convenient, to a boy who seldom had a dime in the pocket of his jeans, but also a matter of pride in one's origins, to be able to climb over the back fence without paying, while other boys were obliged to produce ten cents or — as most of them, in fact, actually did — sneak through behind the bunch of shoats that were always rooting their way under Grandfather's fences. Since there were so many of us Merritts, our family furnished its full quota of athletes, especially of baseball

players. Every summer's team contained an uncle or two, a cousin and, a little later, one brother, "Little John." The latter, after moving to California, just missed becoming a professional.

Some of my sisters and girl cousins would here have much to say of the life at Grandmother Merritt's. To me it was less familiar. The truth is, I was a little afraid of her, whom my mother often quotes to this effect: "Dodie, I've raised so many children of my own, that I'm a little tired of 'em." She had had eight of them. And it was no light task for Irena Conley Merritt to maintain through the years the Conley ideal of cleanliness with that many children to track mud into the freshly scrubbed kitchen. The result was that some of her grandchildren, myself among them, seldom went near the place. Nevertheless, I have a quite vivid image of her, and, at this distance from the tabu against muddy shoes, I can see in her many admirable qualities. She was a hard worker, practically running the small farm. It is often told in the family that, after her death, the cows were so accustomed to being milked by her alone that "Claude had to put on Grandma's old bonnet and apron before Mollie and Bossy would give down their milk."

I remember very well one occasion when my grandmother may have saved us children from a terrible experience. We were all playing in the yard when we saw her running down the railroad to our place. As soon as she was near enough to shout the warning, she sent us tearing into the house and behind locked doors with the announcement that someone's dog had gone mad and was reported in our vicinity. She had conquered her fear of meeting it on the

way, to let us know of our danger. That was in the days before the installation at Atwood of telephones. I can still see my terrified grandmother, racing into the yard, the wind making an appropriate banner of the red petticoat she always wore about the house.

The great variance between what I believe was a natural gayness of spirit in my grandmother and the sobriety of her actual life, is illustrated by a rather pathetic statement she once made to my mother. It was after one of those rare occasions when, in a brief escape from the duties of her household, she went over to Decatur for a day — to the circus. Next day, still clinging to the gaiety and excitement of this hastily stolen holiday, she said: "Dodie, I hope Heaven will be just one continual circus!" She once expressed her wishes regarding burial: "I hope they don't put me way back there in the new part of the graveyard. It looks too lonely. I want to be up by the front gate, where I can see people passin'." In Atwood she had little indeed of diversion besides the weekly meetings of the Rebekahs. Then, my impression is, she was quite another person from the woman who seemed to me to be eternally scrubbing floors. There she loved the gay marching, the dramatic ritual. My mother has told me how carefully she concealed the fact that she had never learned to read or write. Was it from her, I wonder, that my sister, Hazel, who had genuine ability, of the Beatrice Herford sort, derived her fondness for mimicry? — really very clever mimicry. At the marching, Grandmother always did her best, raising her head just a little higher

than her special rival, Aunt "Frank" Harshbarger. Aunt Frank — Joe Merritt's sister — and Joe's Irena were none too friendly, and they made much of this at lodge meetings. Grandmother, on her deathbed, however, said to my mother: "Dodie, I don't hate anybody. I don't even hate Frank."

About the old house, which his "Treenie" kept so spotless, Joe Merritt cared for what was almost a farm: orchard, pasture, garden, and berry patch, all very well tended by Grandfather himself. Here I like to picture him, seated on his cool back porch in midsummer, reading the latest political news or "thrashin' it out" with two wrangling neighbors. Here, too, he was "the Squire."

CHAPTER XXX

SMALL TOWN BOY.

When I was about nine years old, after six charmed years at the Tile Yard, my father gave up the then unprofitable business of making brick and tile, to become again the village blacksmith. He was now sole proprietor of the old shop at Atwood. Meanwhile, my Grandfather Samson having passed away at his old place in Atwood, this became our home.

Anyone who has spent his entire life in Chicago or New York City would suppose that this moving off what was, really, a farm, into a small village, would mean slight change in our manner of living. This is hardly true. I remember that, a few years later, as a high-school student, I and other young citizens of Atwood felt, without any reason, quite superior even to the "Mackvillites" who attended the same classes. And the boys and girls from the neighboring farms we regarded as real "country jakes." We, of the village, in turn, were looked down upon by the occasional boy or girl from Decatur or Springfield, who visited relatives in Atwood. Anyone whom we knew to be from Chicago was indeed distinguished! And I have not forgotten how impressed I was to hear that a cousin had become a housemaid in New York. People from the cities seemed of another world. Sometimes I greatly admired and envied them, as in the case of a certain charming woman who returned to her old home in Atwood, a somewhat successful professional reader. Sometimes, too, I resented their urbanity and sophistication. I remember one lad, of my own age, from Decatur, who now and then visited

country cousins. His clothes, slang, and cocky manner attracted me, yet I thought that I disdained them. Perhaps I did, in a measure. But I fancy mine was largely a sour-grapes reaction. I was reminded of this early friend from the city, only the other day, when I overheard, on the train, a young male sprout, of urban background and not more than twelve years, make a sophisticated reference to Emily Post!

Sophistication, by the way, has become America's god. To be unable to do the current development of "swing" and "truck" is unpardonable. To lack poise in the ordering of the latest innovation in food or drink is to be a bumpkin. To know somewhat of the philosophy of Ouspensky but not to have heard of the latest volume of verse by Edna St. Vincent Millay is, in a slightly more cultured but no less sophisticated society, to have become a museum piece. To miss a boopadoop program on the radio is much graver than passing up a Margaret Anglin production of Greek drama. There are certain things one must know about. But, except in this sense of consisting of the more intelligent minority and a nitwit, conforming horde, our country is still democratically without class division. The only other factual classification is, it seems to me, that based on degree of removal from simple, rural living. I have, during my life, dwelt in the backwoods, on the farm, in the village, and in the city, and the quality of life in each appears to me distinctive. And so, while yet a boy, I ceased to be a farm lad and became a youthful dweller in a typical American small town.

The move brought little change, however, to my mother's days. Here, in our suburban home in California, I never see her, quite smartly dressed, go into town without picturing her as we used to see her, day after day, in our old Illinois home. There was a period of several years when, I think, she would have had to visit Jess Wiley's millinery-shop before attending a funeral: she owned nothing more respectable and proper than a sunbonnet. (She still wears one about the garden.) Though our street in Atwood was the first one parallel to the main thoroughfare, sometimes two years passed without Dodie's even going that one block to buy us children new shoes or stockings. An older sister went, instead. Though friendly and loved, she seldom visited her neighbors. They came to sit with her — and sometimes embarrassed her, on hot evenings, in her bare feet — but she rarely called on them. During those years she never "dressed up" and I cannot picture her, as I remember her during that time, except as working about the place, or resting a moment under one of the big shade-trees, wearing a clean, plain skirt and "dressing-sack." I remember how it used to delight us children when we did see our mother on her way to Robinson & Burger's, to buy a new supply of children's underwear. She often relates: "Once I made me a new dress, of organdie or something. Hester, just a little girl then, saw me and said: 'Why, Mommy! You look just like a flower!'"

But life, though still arduous, did now become a little less so for Dodie. She at least began sending out her big washings.

This I am glad to mention because of the opportunity it gives to speak in grateful praise of the woman who now laundered our blacksmiths' shirts and overalls. For several years it was my Sunday evening duty to carry to Mis' Pruitt a heavy basket of clothes. These I must go after again, a day or two later. Much as I disliked the chore, I am rewarded now by the picture it left me of this patient old woman and her immaculate house, filled with the incense of concentrated sunshine and winter's snowy winds, brought in with her neighbors' spotless linen. I think Heaven will be particularly kind to the Mrs. Pruitts of this world. At least I hope it will not be so unrewarding as was the husband of another of Atwood's washwomen. He, after being supported by his wife's industry through many years, inserted this notice in the Herald: "To whom it may concern: Anyone leaving his dirty clothes at my wife's door, does so at his own risk." Still another local laundress was the good woman whom we knew as "Queen Medley." That may, indeed, have been her true name but, as a very small child, I had the impression that she was, actually, a queen, reduced to washing for a living. This was strengthened by a bit of childish logic: it must be so, since she used "Queen Lillie" soap!

To my father, moving back into town meant more hours at the forge and anvil, which, next to a seat in a poker game, is the situation in which he has always found his greatest happiness. We now saw even less of him than we had at the Tile Factory. One evening, my mother found my youngest sister behind the door, crying.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Poppy looked at me!" was Virginia's answer.

My father's shop was the place where I liked best to play when up town, despite the danger of being commandeered to shoo flies off the horses. Near by, too, was the implement business of Grandfather Merritt. Here, when he was not about, I enjoyed sitting in the shining new buggies and pretending I was driving through the country, which I loved with the passion of some poetic child submerged in the Bowery, rather than one who had never been out of the country. Another favorite loafing place was Mr. Coddington's hardware store, where I was permitted to rummage through a huge barrel into which he threw discarded catalogues, advertising matter, and empty boxes. A place dreaded was the barber-shop, where some idler would suggest that Will Wiley cut off an ear while trimming my hair or some other patron would spit tobacco juice between my bare toes. Von Lanken's Racket Store I seldom entered except at Christmas, when we children spent every moment possible inspecting the holiday stock. As soon as school was out, every afternoon, each of us ten Merritt children inquired for mail of the patient Davies sisters. On Valentine's Day we might actually receive some. At least we could select "comics" for our teachers, this being a side line of the jeweler, who had one corner of the post office building.

Hade and I daily quarrelled over the privilege of going to Latch's store and then over the duty of carrying home our purchases. Each of us, for obvious reasons, wanted to look after the bag of Mary Ann cookies but not the coal oil can. Hade preferred

old Mr. Wiley's grocery because here she could enter blithely, with a genial "Good morning, Mr. Wiley" — who was blind — and sneak us each a pickle. I was too timid for even this bit of petty larceny for I felt that any blind person who could recognize you by the sound of your step would certainly know when his pickle jar was being raided. And I still doubt that Hade was deceiving this kindly old man. Doty's store was most interesting, with one showcase filled with Indian arrowheads, mammoth cucumbers, stuffed birds, and old coins. I liked the odor it had, too, after Mr. Doty had settled the dust and cooled off his watermelons by dampening the worn board floor with a garden sprinkler. How many times have I enjoyed those luscious Illinois melons at the back entrance! Or hot, crisp, wonderful cracklin's from the lard-vat of John Benner's butcher-shop, near by.

Among many other attractions that the town had for a small boy was an old mill, which I can just remember, and which I mention because it had a history that went back to 1836, "the year of the sudden freeze." Miss Piatt says: "Mr. William Monroe thus describes the making of the first mill Unity Township had. 'When we returned home, after the sudden freeze, Mr. Christopher Mosbarger, who was a millwright, and who had brought his tools along, was at our house. We were without breadstuff, and he said to us: "Boys, get your axes and grub-hoes and cut the ice, and by gracious, we makes a mill with prairie 'nigger-heads.'" All went to work and in about four days a mill was made.' This mill was afterward moved from Mr. Jesse Monroe's to where Atwood now is, and was run by horse-power, grinding ten to twenty bushels a day."

Other amenities of life in Atwood were the weekly band concerts through the summer, the chicken-fries that at long last paid off the mortgages on its four churches, the medicine-shows on the main street, and the occasional musical and theatrical programs held in the Opera House during the winter. Among these latter was, of course, the perennial Uncle Tom's Cabin. ~~perfectly described in the words of Don Herold:* "The dogs were poorly~~

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~~* The Reader's Digest, November, 1935.~~

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~~supported by the cast."~~ In earlier years, my mother and father had sometimes assisted in plays given with local talent. The former sometimes remembers, with amusement, her appearance in George Sand's Fanchon, The Cricket. My father preferred, to the true drama, a position in the Negro minstrel given each winter. With regard to more serious aspects of the theatre, Grandfather Samson often spoke proudly of his having once seen Sol Smith Russell, and Joseph Jefferson in Rip Van Winkle. To return to my own generation, how impressed was I at my first attendance at a really good dramatic performance! — She Stoops to Conquer, with William H. Crane. This, I saw with my mother, in the old Powers' Theatre, in Decatur. Later, I had an even greater thrill, at Powers', this time backstage, as a "super" in the Maude Adams production of What Every Woman Knows. But we are still at Atwood, and Atwood is our world.

The older I grew, the farther into the true country did I wander. What a tiny world, in geographical distances, was mine

in those days, yet how vast and rich in interest and beauty! A favorite tramp was that through old Mackville, thence south across the railroad to the Drew Bridge, and back into Atwood from its southern edge. Or I might reverse the route, in order to approach the Levi Drew place from that better vantage: this farmhouse, handsome for those days, was, to any country boy of the 'Nineties, something of a "mansion." To me it was a veritable castle. There were remoter regions, also, to be visited — some of them as much as ten miles from home! On Sundays and holidays, Mr. "Coddy's" Indian pony and phaeton might take us Merritt children as far afield as the Harshbarger Church. I remember, too, going with the Marshall twins to Ivesdale, where I entered, for the first time, a Catholic church, and thought I had suddenly strayed into Paradise. Once in a while, I went with Uncle Zeph on his mail route, through the Quick and Harshbarger neighborhood, jolting along in the box-like conveyance in which Uncle Sam's rural mail was then delivered. And I remember a few occasions when friendly Sam Bauman took me along in his "huxtry" wagon, a picturesque institution of that day. For the enlightenment of those unfortunates who have never seen one, let me explain that this huckster's wagon was a sort of general merchandise store on wheels. Its long body and front, beneath the high seat, contained numerous compartments from which Sam sold to busy farm women everything from a spool of thread or yard of calico to a bottle of Peruna. Payment was chiefly made in eggs, poultry, and home-churned butter — the latter, in shock-of-wheat moulds, usually pretty strong by the time it

reached the Merritt table. The poultry, as it accumulated, filled the coops that formed the rear and under portions of this strange vehicle. I remember one such ride with Sam when we stopped for our noon meal and siesta at the home of "Uncle" Chris and "Aunt" Bet Masterson. The latter welcomed us with a glass of homemade wine, which was so much too heady for my age and experience that the whole world passed into a cosmic oblivion. I must have been quite small, for I remember being somewhat afraid of Aunt Bet's turkey cock, with outspread wings and tail. On occasions almost as rare as this, Johnnie, after much pressure, was sometimes persuaded to hire one of Frank Lawrence's livery teams and surreys for a Sunday trip to Arthur or Tuscola. On all these outings, a favorite pastime was counting bridges, schoolhouses, and especially country graveyards.

I think the thing I find it pleasantest to remember of our life there, in Grandfather Samson's old house at Atwood, was the summer nights on the front porch, watching the "lightning bugs," listening to the katydids. Though by day I lived in the shade or among the branches of our two beautiful elms, there was no situation of my life in those days when I was so absorbed by God in nature as on those quiet, heavenly evenings. The whole acre or so of which the place then consisted, with its strawberry bed, grown wild, its clump of plum trees, and its lovely elms and maples, had about it a peaceful aura that I like to think of as the mantle of Grandfather Samson's placid spirit, fallen there to bless all who found shelter under the roof of our beloved forebear.

CHAPTER XXXI

SCHOOL DAYS.

Neither mauve nor any other single color seems to me appropriate symbol for the last decade of the nineteenth century, as we of the rural Midwest knew it. For, while my mother and other Piatt County housekeepers were, perhaps, beginning to replace rag-carpets with rose-patterned Brussels in the parlor, in other rooms of the house the locally woven, multicolored rag strips still served. And there yet lingered, throughout the Middle West, what may be called a rag-carpet culture, one of its principal elements being the public school.

Important as it is to any child, to me school was second in importance only to my mother's hearth. Next to home, in my affections, was the old frame structure at Atwood, whether during the school term or in midsummer, when I loved to wander through the tall grass that grew up under its grove of box elders. I always looked forward to its reopening.

For some time after the removal, in the 'Seventies and 'Eighties, of most of Mackville's citizens to Atwood, the new town was without a school, so that its pupils were obliged to continue at Lickskillet. Let us turn for a moment to its history.

Miss Piatt says that the first school in Unity Township

"was taught about 1842, by John Collins, in a little house with paper windows and on land now belonging to the Benjamin Quick estate." Elsewhere she states that the township's first teacher was Jonathan Wildman. It is possible that to both Collins and Wildman should go the laurel, for it may be that classes were held in some cabin home even prior to the raising of the building mentioned above. Piatt also records that the first school in the Mackville district was "in a log house on land now owned by the widow of Adam Shonkwiler." This, I am inclined to believe, was the one in which my mother's family had a brief residence. In 1858, Mr. James Lewis taught the first school in the little building that served Mackville from that date until the erection of the Atwood school, in the 'Eighties. It was in this, the last in Mackville, that both my parents received their meager training. Among its early teachers were: J. A. Hawks, Mrs. Hawks, John H. Easton, Miss Anna Davies, and Joseph Trenchard.

Of the Hawks family, I have already spoken. Mrs. Hawks's aunt, who became my Grandfather Samson's second wife, had also taught a rural school, in or near the Harshbarger settlement, where she boarded with Aunt Bet and Uncle Chris Masterson. Three generations of pupils had for teacher some member or other of the related Easton, Davies, and Blackwell families, who still provide the community a solid intellectual leaven. The father of Mrs. Easton and her sisters was Mr. James Davies, whom I

myself remember, since he survived most of his contemporaries. He was born in England in 1812. I believe he had been a hedge-trimmer, in Shropshire.

Besides Mr. Easton — whom I later knew and esteemed — my mother had for teacher among those mentioned, Joseph Trenchard. "Every one of us girls," she says, "fell in love with Joe Trenchard." Thirty-five years later I was to meet him at De Land, Illinois, where I myself taught the fifth and sixth grades, one of my pupils being his young nephew, Wendell Bondurant Trenchard. This lad must have seemed, during my very amateur labors, one of "teacher's pets." In his high-topped shoes and knickerbockers, this attractive young gentleman was a fit symbol for one of the most nearly ideal households it has ever been my privilege to enter. He, his little sister Mary, and his parents lived in the beautiful country home of Wendell's great-aunt, Miss Mary Bondurant, whom I had first heard mentioned as "the richest woman in Piatt County." Certainly she was one of the finest.

The Bondurants were a pioneer Piatt County family. One wonders if they were not descendants of those of the name listed among the Huguenots who fled to Virginia during its early history. Fellow passengers on a vessel sailing to "Manicanton" in 1700 were Jean Pierre Bondurant and Jean Marot. Remembering my Grandfather Merritt's statement that his people were living around Norfolk as early as 1700, the imaginative genealogist in me toys with the idea that descendants of the two Jeans may have met 210 years later in Piatt County, Illinois. (Also with the

totally unverified notion that my line may be descended from the same Marot sources, near Norfolk, as President John Tyler.)

Piatt says that Martha (Mrs. Joseph) Bondurant, *née* Thorpe, was living with her family in Sangamon County, Illinois, in 1854, later moving to Piatt. Her eldest son, Thomas E., came to the latter in 1854, buying land at fifty cents an acre. His sister, Mary, taught in various schools in the county. Though retired when I knew her, she was still patron saint of the De Land school, leading other women of the town in movements toward the welfare of its youth, often entertaining the entire school — once, I remember, at the town's first Victrola concert — in her lovely home, and giving a dinner, sumptuous but in good taste, to each class as it graduated from the De Land High School.

Though my life has taken me, at least briefly, across the threshold of every sort of American home, from that of some ignorant, even vicious family of city slums to the state governor's mansion and the California *hacienda* of the estimable mother of William Randolph Hearst, none has impressed me like that of Miss Bondurant. She had, I believe, *entrée* to the society of official Springfield, she had travelled, yet her greatest happiness was in her little family and her neighbors. Almost daily I heard of some kindness done, such as the sending to a sickbed, in midsummer, of ice cut in local creeks and stored in sawdust on her own place. Interested in the college at Eureka, Illinois, she employed students during vacation to tend her beautiful lawn and garden. I remember an informal dinner when I was the only guest

and thus given a glimpse of this ideal home as it no doubt existed from day to day, presided over by "Miss B" and another fine woman, Mrs. Lucy Thornton Trenchard, her niece. I remember that "the hired girl" sat with us at table, without sign of humbleness. She, the only servant except the gardener, shared a room upstairs with the mistress herself. I remember the charming manners of the children, their quiet, decorous behavior, and, notwithstanding this, their unchecked delight at discovering we were to have their favorite pie. Nor have I forgotten another visit, made to the young gentleman of the household, Wendell, spending a day in his bright bedchamber, ill from eating too many pancakes. Nor a first visit of Miss Bondurant to my schoolroom and my earliest talk with her, when, at my saying I preferred the country to the city, she revealed her own love for a simple, rural manner of living.

Through the more than quarter-century since I was a teacher at De Land, this picture of American family life at its potential best has stayed with me. When I hear the wealth of others decried by those who would not use it wisely if they had it, when I see families rich in culture and personality obliged to live shabbily, when I find undisciplined children showing rude disdain of their elders — who often merit it — when, above all, I observe the results of money wedded to stupidity, I remember those glimpses of the Bondurant home, and pray its like may ultimately become the rule and not the isolated exception in America.

The town of De Land itself, at the time of my short stay there, was worthy of an economist's expert study of its plain,

democratic, wholesome life. My impression was that the unusual prosperity — not wealth, but plenty — of its population and of the farmers surrounding it, made it almost unique. I felt that, much more than Atwood, it might have been used by other villages as a model of its size.

I am afraid its people may have been much less favorably impressed with the new teacher than I with them. It shames me to reflect how poor a schoolmaster I was — how bad my practices must have seemed to the principal, Otto Weedman, and his splendid wife, whose pleasant home I shared. And to that Lincolnlike County Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Charles McIntosh, who had, out of a kind heart, given me a permit to teach, and was rewarded by seeing his curriculum set aside by a young naïf who neglected spelling to read aloud to his charges from Kate Douglas Wiggin. Both McIntosh and Weedman were more ardent sticklers for the three R's than I. Moreover, I had the temerity to grade my pupils solely upon the basis of their daily recitation. When Weedman discovered I was actually not grading examination papers, he must have felt he was housing a criminal. I dare say there was some criminal negligence in my methods. I salve my conscience with recollections of the eager faces of boys and girls in whom I did, nevertheless, seem to stimulate an enthusiasm for a realistic geography, a vivid history of their country, and an interest in good English literature.

Indeed, were I now a teacher, I might still retain some of

those educational theories. Had I a son, my great fear of seeing him become an automaton in the average city school and college would cause me to farm him out on one of my Oregon neighbors' homesteads, where he might attend the little school that stood on my own place there. "Pig-Tail," we called it, after its politics became involved in a mountain feud over a razorback. Physically and culturally, it was not unlike the school Abe Lincoln attended. And, though its enrollment sometimes went down to half a dozen, I am convinced actual scholarship was considerably higher there than in most city schools with attendance running into the thousands. With such pedagogical notions, I am glad to learn that my native Illinois still has almost 10,000 one-room schools, more than any other state in the Union. Some of my young Oregon friends — mostly Finns — graduates of Pig-Tail College, rise each school morning in the dark woods, milk the cows by lantern light, walk three miles to the terminal of the school-bus, and ride seven more, to spend the day at Willamina High School, probably as good as the average township high school. Returning, they do their chores, in winter, in the early dusk, and prepare tomorrow's lessons in a clean, comfortable backwoods cabin. What a background for their future lives, wherever or however lived! Perhaps another Lincoln will come out of it.

Though it might be said of Charles McIntosh, as it was of the teachers in pioneer Nebraska, that with them "Arithmetic received very thorough ventilation," yet his admirable spirit and devotion to duty so inspire me that I am in danger of

*See footnote, over.

Footnote to "Arithmetic received very thorough ventilation": The Sod-House Frontier: 1854-1890, by Everett Dick (D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc., N. Y., 1937). P. 327.

overeulogizing him — and of inviting the charge that these pages of mine form what was called, in the 'Seventies and 'Eighties, a "mug book," composed by the subjects themselves at so much per line and portrait. But praise of Piatt County's veteran superintendent would be, from any pen, sincere. I see him now, after thirty years, suddenly appearing, like a silent benediction, to visit each of the six rooms in Atwood's combined grade and high school. In spite of his kindly, gray eyes, with their fixed crow's-feet, his tall presence filled our teachers with emotions quite different. So conscientious a laborer was he himself in the education of Piatt's youth, that every teacher stood in great awe before him. I have not forgotten my own panic when he visited De Land.

Even after Atwood had taken much of Mackville's population away from it, the children of the new village had to humble themselves by going back to Lickskillet for an education. Later, I believe, some went to the Otter School, east of Atwood. Then, in the late 1880's, Atwood erected the building in which every one of us ten Merritt children received at least the beginning of his education.

And each of us had Miss Lydia Biggs for his first teacher. Before she retired, she had taught two generations of most families in the vicinity and, if I am not mistaken, in some cases three. No member of my own clan deserves more to be named here. "Miss Lydie" represented the almost maternal relationship of teacher to child of those days. I can mention nothing more

characteristic of her constant service to us all than the little medicine-cabinet that always occupied a place in her tidy, attractive schoolroom. Years after my leaving Atwood, my sister, Hazel, and I sat in the home of our family's old friend, Mrs. Shalburg, in California, and watched Miss Lydie, a visitor there, come down the stair to greet her two former pupils. The thought, I remember, that came into my mind as I waited at the foot of the stairway, was this: "How perfectly charming she is! Little wonder we children loved her so." Place such people as Miss Lydie, my mother, and my Oregon neighbor, Mrs. Patterson, in any setting, however formal and distinguished, and their personality will mark them out above the others. They are of the Obscure Great.

Though we pupils at Atwood left Miss Lydie's room after two years, we continued in the same building until we were eligible for the university. For Atwood then had but one schoolhouse, an old frame structure, with square cupola and heavy wooden fire-escapes. It stood at the north edge of town, midway between the post office and what the years and a small cyclone had left of Mackville. Thus, by the time one had become a senior in high school — occupying the room directly above Miss Lydie's — the latter had become as familiar a fixture as the old bell or the trees that, in winter, waved their leafless branches outside the windows or, in spring, displayed bursting buds and brought spring fever. Almost equally a part of the institution seemed Miss Lena Gross, another excellent teacher, whose promotion to a higher grade coincided with my own for five consecutive years, a fortunate thing for me

and my class.

Autobiography often becomes a record not of the typical, but of the extraordinary. And in here remembering my school days, I am reminded of two or three things that I associate with them but that scarcely belonged to our daily life there. We used to have another visitor at the school who frightened us pupils even more, perhaps, than Mr. McIntosh terrified our teachers. Many Illinoisians will remember "Immortal J. N.," who, though quite mad, spent his days travelling over the state, without paying a fare, declaring to breathless boys and girls in their classes his immortality. The legend was that he had once been a distinguished judge or lawyer, that he had brought about the hanging of a man who was later found innocent, and that this had so preyed upon his just mind that he had lost his reason. "Immortal J. N." is dead now, and I am reminded that we children, more in ignorance than in irony, called him "'Mortal J. N." I shall never forget my own terror when, hurrying one day to the boys' privy, after delayed permission to be excused, I discovered this long-haired wraith in the hall, mumbling his eternality to the shadowed walls and staircase! (I dare say my errand was consummated then and there.) Another visitor, scarcely less frightening, stood before us one day, in the shabby garb that we often saw on tramps walking the railroad ties, and for a full hour recited pages and pages from Homer. We pupils and, I am afraid, our teachers had to take his word that it was Homer.

When, recently, I visited the classes taught by Miss Clover Miller, in an immense junior high school, more like a university than a preparatory school, I could not help comparing it, first with Pig-Tail, then with my own alma mater of the Illinois prairies. In criticism, not of Clover — who merits classification, perhaps, with Miss Lydie — but of the schools of to-day, especially those of the larger cities, I could not withhold this accusation: "Clover, it's awful! These aren't schools. They're madhouses! There's but one thing left here of Lickskillet and Pig-Tail: that small-boy odor of every schoolroom. Thank heaven, <u>something</u> goes on forever!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THE VANISHING WILD.

No phase of our country's history, except that having to do with the Indian, contains more cause for national shame than the manner in which we have despoiled our continent of its natural beauty and wildness. It is sad but interesting to look into the causes of this prodigality. One of these, particularly, is obvious: it is not strange that, in a land as primeval as our earliest American ancestors found this, the ax should have been wielded without thought of a to-morrow. What began as necessity — the clearing of an all but impenetrable wilderness — became unjustified habit.

Donald Culross Peattie* says of the early Illinoisians that

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*A Prairie Grove (The Literary Guild of America, Inc., Pubd. by Simon and Schuster, Inc., N. Y., 1938). Pp. 148-9. Used through the courtesy of the author and of Simon & Schuster, Inc., New York.

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they were "a forest people; they had a tradition that you had to clear the trees away before you could farm. . . . avoiding the prairies, cutting down the woods. They were afraid of the prairies; these looked empty and lonesome. . . . Men in the forested bottoms had been known to shelter a whole family, the first winter, in the hollow of a giant sycamore." The children of early Illinois "could find the cattle in the woods, but it seemed that on the prairies, where there was no timber for the snake rail fence, the beasts might wander over the world's rim." I find my Great-grand-

father Conley exemplifying this point, when he makes his ~~second~~ third Coles County clearing nearer the Embarrass River — or was it a branch, Whetstone Creek? — where the deer were more "plenty." The tragic Black Hawk "looked back defeated from the Iowa shore and said, 'It is a beautiful land; I give it to you; enjoy it.'"

To see how beautiful it was and how little we have husbanded its beauty for future occupants, let us read, from Miss Piatt and others, how it looked to our great-grandparents. What they found and, with their progeny's help, destroyed in Piatt County, is but typical, alas! of a whole continent's despoliation. "Before the county was settled, the buffalo and black bear might have been found on the prairies, or in the forests along the Sangamon, when the red man alone claimed the soil; but they have all fled at the approach of civilization, leaving only trails, bones, etc., to tell of their existence here. The Virginia deer were not all exterminated until a few years ago. In 1869 a deer was run through the public square of Monticello. . . . As early as 1833 there disappeared a beautiful bird of the parrot family, Carolina parroquet, and the wild turkey was once an inhabitant of the county. The Canada lynx and wild cat were found up till 1860 and the wild boar was abundant formerly." Elsewhere she lists the "brant goose," still plentiful in the Mackville region during my Grandfather Samson's residence there. The Lake Fork valley was, perhaps, even more replete with wild life than other portions of the county. Miss Piatt suggests that this little stream may have derived its

name from the section's having been, at first, a timber-fringed swamp, which sometimes became a "lake."

In such a land, all were hunters. So true was this that it was thought worthy of mention that one pioneer, "Uncle Ezra" Marquiss, never killed a deer in his life! "Wolves were a great annoyance to the early settlers. Many ways and means were devised for exterminating them. They were chased with bloodhounds, dug from their lairs, and caught in traps. . . . One of Mr. William Wright's children was lost, and they supposed it was eaten by the timber-wolves. The child followed a pet deer off. Some bones were afterward found which were supposed to be those of the child." In early Illinois, as in the Florida of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's The Yearling, children often made pets of orphaned fawns. (My little Oregon neighbor, Maybelle Kay, kept one, only a few years ago.) Peter Croninger, another Piatt settler, "often, by hunting nights and mornings of a month's time, would kill deer sufficient to fill a hogshead with the hams. He still" — in the early 'Eighties — "continues to have a reputation as a rail-maker. He has made rails each season since he was a boy, and used to make as many as 200 rails a day." (I am told that the old rail fences I once loved to follow, for the strip of wildness they sheltered, are largely gone from the vicinity of my old home. Also, that apple and cherry trees from which I feasted have been allowed to die, without being replaced. Piatt County consumers find it easier to buy fruit imported from commercially operated orchards. Thus does "progress" rob us of many old amenities.

But it is sentimental to protest.) Another old hunter, Samuel McKee, made the statement to Miss Piatt that he had once seen and counted over a hundred deer in a single herd. Perhaps the last deer taken in my native township, Unity, and in the county as well, was one killed there in 1870. Wolves were frequently seen in Unity during the years following the Civil War. In '77, William Marian, over in adjacent Douglas County, made news by killing "a gray eagle measuring six feet four inches from wing to wing, and weighing twenty-four pounds."* Piatt County had at least one

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Tuscola (Ill.) Journal, "60 Years Ago," Jan. 21, 1937.

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professional hunter in the early 'Eighties, when Lemuel Carter was shipping annually 700 ducks, 1200 rabbits, 1500 prairie-chickens, and 2500 quails. One of Mackville's founders, "Buckskin Joe" Moore, remembered having killed as many as seven deer in a single day. He and a neighbor agreed to quit hunting whenever the deer became so thinned out that they could not take at least one each day. And they did quit. It is unfortunate others did not do the same.

Fish? Nelson Ater and four or five others "went seining to Henderson Ford. With but three draws of the seine they got a spring-wagon bed of fish."

There was more justification in exterminating the countless snakes then found on the Illinois prairies. John W. C. Gray, of Unity Township, declared that "by actual count and record in the season of 1856, he killed 1100 rattlesnakes, killing as high as

thirty-three in one day." The first death in the town of Cerro Gordo is thought to have been that of a lad named Eugene Denman, who died from a rattler's bite.

It was during the 'Fifties that my Grandfather Merritt carried the mail across eastern central Illinois. Atwood was then unborn. It seems his itinerary did not take him quite to Lickskillet, either, though its mail was doubtless relayed, from cabin to cabin, to the Harshbarger settlement, through which he passed on his way to or from Monticello. It is not farfetched to suppose him using stretches at least of original buffalo and Indian trails. Miss Piatt says that one such, a buffalo path, could still be seen, in the 'Eighties, "about half a mile west of Mr. McIntosh's mill on the Sangamon River." And of early man-made roads: "Probably the first visible road of the county was that which led from Sadorus Grove to James Piatt's cabin, and on to the trading-house near the mouth of Friends Creek. Not long since, we saw traces of this old road in John Piatt's present door-yard. After a number of families were located here, it was sometimes the custom to break roads between the settlements by hitching oxen to a log and dragging it throughout the distance, and ofttimes a furrow was made to show where the road was. . . . The first state road intersecting the county was that leading from Danville, via Big Grove (Urbana), through what is now Monticello, and on to Springfield. The road extending diagonally across Blue Ridge Township, which is known as the State Road, was never surveyed as such, according to one of the early settlers in that vicinity. The road was gained by people settling on

it." It was used as early as 1832, and formerly went via Cheney's Grove. "Probably Mr. Richard Webb was the first to settle on it in this county. It was five years after the first settlement was made on Lake Fork ere officers of any kind found the people. William Monroe got up a petition that led to the location of the first local road, which extended from Monticello to the head of Lake Fork, and on down the east side of the same stream. John Tenbrooke surveyed the road, and William Monroe made the furrow with Hiram Heath's ox team. After a time William Monroe got up another petition, for a state road extending from Charleston to Bloomington, and in this county, following in almost the direct route of the former road." This would be, surely, my grandfather's route from "Harshbarger" to Monticello. "For quite a while the mail of the county was all carried on horseback, and ofttimes unlocked saddle-bags contained the precious load. Letters formed the principal bulk, and the postage on each was from ten to twenty-five cents. They were sometimes weeks in reaching their destination. The postage could be paid at either end, and more often the receiver paid. . . . Mr. O. C. Denslow was the first postmaster, on land owned by Mr. Samuel Harshbarger. The post office was moved to Mr. Jesse Monroe's house and Richard Monroe was appointed postmaster. The route was discontinued after the Toledo, Wabash & Warsaw Railroad was built."

And what of <u>human</u> life in this almost pristine biota? Beattie says that "humans have to take their place where it falls in the fauna." And "do not ask of prairie Nature that it shall be

pretty, for it is male. . . . This is a tall hard male nature"*

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* A Prairie Grove. Pp. 18-19, 97, & 228.

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in Unity and Piatt, as in all Illinois, with woods and opens infested with wolves and venemous serpents, to bring death to small son or daughter. Little wonder that the more sensitive of its pioneering women, like Eliza Jane Samson, should break under its hardness. Yet, once somewhat tamed, how attractive did this land become — its maleness tempered by such feminine elements as a regard for one's troubled neighbor, hospitality for each stranger, a rough tenderness for all in need of it.

Miss Piatt speaks often of the hospitality shown her while preparing her book. Two cavalcades had marched into the county: one from Ohio, the second from Kentucky and other Southern states. From the latter, perhaps, came more of neighborliness than was usual even for those early times. These furnished the county several of its "snow birds," as those first citizens who came before "the winter of the deep snow," 1830-31, called themselves. Mr. George Hayworth "was the first man to settle within the limits of what is now Piatt County. He came to Illinois from Tennessee with a colony of Quakers. Some went to Tazewell, some to Vermilion County, while Mr. Hayworth came to Piatt, in the spring of 1822. He built a small log-cabin on what is now W. E. Lodge's place in Monticello. Soon after, with the assistance of some Indians, he built near the other a larger cabin. . . . Mr. Hayworth lived in his new home about three years, when he went to Danville

to school his children. In 1829 he owned a hewed log-house, the largest residence in Danville." These very first newcomers, at least, found the Indian still dwelling on the Sangamon and other local streams. "The Kickapoo and Pottawattomie Indians in this vicinity outnumbered the white people, so it was to them that the lad Nathan Henline looked for company. He soon made many lasting friends among the Indian boys, and for several years was almost constantly with his swarthy playmates. He learned to be almost as swift on foot as the Indians, and their arts of fishing and trapping were made known to him."

There were many Kentuckians among the first residents at Mackville. My mother has often spoken of their hospitality. This, indeed, is inevitable in such situations, as I myself learned on my Oregon homestead, where a welcome was sincere because it answered a real need — that of human intercourse. In our grandparents' day, a community was a family, nothing less. Many incidents in Miss Piatt's book show this. "There was a walnut tree, which stood on an island a little below the Bender Ford of the Sangamon River, which for fifteen years was known as the 'coffin tree.' Several of the first people who died in the county were buried in coffins made by neighbors from this tree. These people were buried a little southwest of Rhoades Park, in Monticello. No trace of this burial-ground now remains. The tree was used for other purposes, too. Abraham and Ezra Marquiss made a good table out of it, and William Piatt made several bedsteads from the same tree."

Daniel Harshbarger told Miss Piatt that "in early days the people used often to get quite lonesome. At Mr. Monroe's they used to go on top of the house, to watch across the prairie, hoping to see someone coming. In case they should, word would soon be sent around and all the neighborhood would collect at one house. . . . Mrs. Elizabeth Dudley, in speaking of her early home, stated that it was quite customary for herself and her neighbors, several miles distant, to exchange visits, taking their cows and staking them out to enjoy a new field of grass, while the women chatted over knitting or sewing. While making these visits, Mrs. Dudley became quite an expert snake-killer." An instance of hospitality quite unbelievable to us of these days is cited in the case of William and Sarah J. (Moore) Monroe, of early Lickskillet, who, having no children of their own, "during their married life had in charge as many as thirty-four children, sending twenty-two of them to school."

Much of this survived in the 'Eighties. "Buckskin Joe" Moore, when interviewed, "displayed the characteristic and genuine pioneer hospitality. He seemed to take it for granted that we had come to spend the day. In terse pioneer sentences he bade us welcome. We were scarcely seated in his hewed log-house when we caught a glimpse of our horses disappearing into the stable. . . . Mr. Moore came to Piatt county about 1836. In 1844 he put up what he supposes to be the first hewed log-house in the township. He still lives in the house. Mr. Moore's sisters used to get on horses and travel to Charleston, twenty-eight miles distant,

in order to receive letters from their lovers." This must have been in the days before the inauguration of my grandfather's mail route.

In spite of the abundance of wild game and other easily procurable foods, pioneer hospitality increased the necessity for an admirable thrift and resourcefulness. With the large families of those days and the universally recognized duty of feeding all passers-by, no wonder the women learned to make molasses from watermelons and beets, and "butter" from muskmelons. Or, as my Conley kin did, syrup from boiled corncobs. (It was denied them to telephone the corner grocer for canned new potatoes, tinned chicken gravy, and cellophaned, zippered, streamlined biscuit dough. The poor things had not only to bake their own bread, but to slice it themselves! Is it strange that my sister, Maude, eldest of ten, developed in her slices a concavity truly individual?) In very early years, even the need of sweets was supplied by the woods themselves, as shown in the following bit of Douglas County history:* "It was in the fall of the year, a little more than a

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*Tuscola (Ill.) Journal, Feb. 11, 1937. An article by Garnett Gibson.

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century ago, when the first white man settled in Douglas County. Discovery of the county was an accident. If the first white settler, John Richman, had not been a lover of honey, Douglas County probably would not have been settled for several years, except for roving bands of Indians, who had their trading post at Bridgeport, now called Hugo. When Richman and a companion came on their exploring trip from Georgetown to what is now Douglas County, in quest of

wild honey, they followed the course of the Embarrass River, south to the present Camargo. In the timber, as far south as Patterson Springs, they were able to secure several barrels of honey from the countless bee trees scattered along the banks.

"This beautiful prairie country so fascinated Richman that the next spring, 1829, he and his family settled one mile west of the present Camargo, in timber skirting the Embarrass. At the time, there was not another white family within the limits of Douglas County and none in Coles north of Charleston. For more than a year the Richmans lived in solitude, then they were joined by Harison Gill, and six months later by Isaac Moss, who settled about one mile east of Camargo. Indians were in the neighborhood three years after the coming of these pioneers. . . .

"The closest flour mill was at Eugene, Indiana. The only market was Chicago, to which the settlers hauled corn for thirty cents a bushel. . . . Fifteen miles was not considered a great undertaking for an afternoon's visit. In a country where there were no fences or landmarks, it required skill to cross a prairie even in daylight. Stars were a reliable guide to a night traveller, but if the night was foggy, a steady wind often proved a good guide, the traveller noting whether it struck his nose from left or right cheek. It was also the practice of the early settler to put up a signal light, to mark his cabin."

Though I remember no bee trees about my Piatt County home, I do recall the destruction of a magnificent elm that must have stood through several generations of Black Hawk's ancestry. It

was, I believe, even larger than the two big ones that stood near Grandfather Samson's house in Atwood. Standing just west of the town, near the Tile Yard pits, it was known as "The Big Tree." It must have seen many a wild creature, many an Indian, pass beneath its mighty arms.

CHAPTER XXXIII

BACK O' BEYOND.

It would be sad to return to my Illinois home and find no longer there the patches of undisturbed wild life still remaining in the 'Nineties. Are there any fragments left of the beds of wild flowers that used to stretch along the railroad west of Atwood? Here we children found deer's-tongue, lady's-slipper, violets — purple, white, and yellow, and, in late summer, wild asters and black-eyed-Susans. On excursions in search of these, we sometimes took with us huge slices of bread-and-butter, with which we made sandwiches from the wild onions that grew in solid masses, like grass. These, evidently, had been abundant in earlier times. Carl Sandburg* quotes some political tomfoolery of Abe Lincoln

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* Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years. Pp. 246-7.

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that contains a reference to them: "By the way, Mr. Speaker, did you know I am a military hero? Yes, sir; in the days of the Black Hawk War I fought, bled, and came away. If General Cass went ahead of me in picking huckleberries, I guess I surpassed him in charges upon the wild onions. If he saw any live, fighting Indians it was more than I did; but I had a good many bloody struggles with the mosquitoes." (This brings to mind the "Huckleberry War" of my old friend, John Connolly, a skirmish against the Indians of Minnesota. Connolly and his comrades encountered no

Sioux, but they ate too many huckleberries. Connolly later saw plenty of Indians, as a "mule-skinner" on Custer's earlier expeditions.)

I cannot forbear adding here another plea, to the many already made, against the thoughtless destruction, throughout our nation, of primal life in plant and animal. I believe it should be a formal part of the curriculum of every school in the land to teach the esthetic and practical need of preserving what is left of the natural beauty of our country. I suggest as a text the volume Wild Turkeys and Tallow Candles,* by Ellen Hayes. The

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* Pp. 28-9.

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author says, of early Ohio, that it "had not been manhandled. Civilization had not entered and begun the strewing of its unsightly débris. The moccasined Indian slipping along his indistinct trail had not marked his camping-spots with tin cans and broken bottles, coal-ash heaps, discarded barbed wire and refuse papers. Only one who has searched for a clean spot -- a bit of grass fit to rest on — in the suburbs of European cities and towns, or the United States towns, for that matter, can adequately appreciate in imagination the cleanliness of the New West. The land was clean and the streams, large and small, were pure. The sweet limpid waters of Clear Run were good enough for the baby's bath or the tea-kettle. Untainted it took its way over the shining little sand-bars or rested under wholesome clay banks where willow shadows fell, until it joined its big brother the

creek."

To one who grew up in the rural America of 1890-1910, it often seems pitiable to see thousands of boys and girls to-day enjoying no closer contact with the uncontaminated countryside than week-end trips from hot-dog stand to soda-pop station. Into what sort of race shall we develop if we do not soon turn our faces back to field and wood? While it is perhaps true that children born in cities do now have easier access to the country than formerly, how much of this is a simple sharing of normal country living? A teacher in Los Angeles assures me that most of her pupils have never seen a cow! It is encouraging to note, in some, a real hunger for old conditions. Recently, in the Chicago Tribune, there appeared a correspondent's account of his surprised discovery of a tree, growing on the concrete banks of the little stream that runs through the heart of that metropolis — a stream that was once, I suppose, a willow-shaded creek. His letter so interested readers of the Tribune that the paper's next issue contained a photograph of a group gathered to see this wildling with the temerity to attempt life in the fissure of a city pavement. There are trees in the parks of Chicago, to be sure, but this one had been planted by Nature. God pity a race that must grow excited over one dwarfed remnant of primeval life! How painful to compare certain sections of our country as they exist to-day with the pictures of them given us by our grandparents: as one of their California contemporaries has pointed out, whereas they lived with the deer and the antelope for neighbors, we of

our day can boast only the rat and the mouse. If any reader be in search of a Cause, surely he could find none worthier than this: "To rescue for human society the native values of rural life," which I am glad to see carved in stone on one of the buildings of the University of California.

Man has strayed farther than he realizes from that relation to nature imperative to his happiness. Let the feather-witted city vacationist exclaim, "What's that strange odor? Nature?" He is not so gay as he thus desperately tries to appear. Behold the throngs of rural Iowans, sojourning in Los Angeles, seeking God and "the Silence" in city "temples," instead of looking for Him in the pastures and along the streams of Home. Even art, which should be, next to religion, of the very nature of nature, is divorced from it. Thomas Hart Benton, in his An Artist in America,* quotes

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*Robert M. McBride & Co., N. Y., 1937. P. 47.

Stanton Wright, who left New York for the West because, as Wright said, he was tired of "chasing art up the back alleys of New York." So are we all tired of seeing those back alleys, framed. And you need to do more than go West, young man. Nowhere is there a more monstrous heap of tin cans and barbed wire than in the art galleries of Los Angeles, San Franciso, and Carmel.

In contrast to all this, it is cheering to come across the following tribute to Mr. W. T. Lodge,* of Monticello, Illinois.

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*In the Tuscola (Ill.) Journal, Mar. 8 & May 17, 1934.

Through the years, Mr. Lodge has maintained on his farm a wild flower sanctuary. He is justly proud of "one crocus that has bloomed every spring for fifty-seven years." Mr. Lodge pleads for the organization "of conservation groups that shall save certain areas for future generations by protecting trees, shrubs, and wild flowers." His "wildwood retreat comprises about sixteen acres of virgin timber lying along the Sangamon River and including steep hillsides and low bottom lands in which a wide variety of plant life may be found. Mr. Lodge is seeking to restore this bit of timberland to its former estate as a virgin forest, and plants that have been killed out are being coaxed back. The wild orchard is being coddled and, so far, seems to be thriving. The owner is trying to reëstablish the hazel brush."

Let others get busy with similar programs. That many, indeed, are busy, one is glad to note. The 4-H Clubs, for example, are taking definite steps in this direction. One of the groups worthiest of support is the Wilderness Society, of Washington, D. C. Commendable as are, in general, the labors of various organizations in encouraging the perpetuation of natural beauty in the form of national parks and forest reserves, the Wilderness Society seems particularly important because of its fight to maintain absolutely primeval conditions where that is still possible. Surely the typical American motorist and vacationist now have their lion's share. Surely they should be content with having taken over Yellowstone Park, the Grand Canyon, and Yosemite Valley, to which they have complete access, with private radio —

publicly shared. Surely another type of nature lover should now be heard, above the din, pleading for the things a Burroughs or a John Muir would wish to see conserved: the quiet, the untouched God-ness of a wilderness created by God without man's help. Let us have a few square miles of true wilderness, secure against invasion by the Sunday tourist. ~~who, in a recent bit of humor, is made to exclaim: "That's an attractive village we're coming to, wasn't it?"*~~

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~~*From "Patter," in The Reader's Digest, Apr., 1934.~~

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Donald Culross Peattie, in A Prairie Grove,* says that the

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P. 97.

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early French, in Illinois, were "two months from Kébec, and you cannot now, except upon antarctic ice or in the Matto Grosso, get two months away from anything." Is man, then, so stupid that this is to become literally and absolutely true? Or is he, as I still believe, to react at last to past folly in an intelligent attention to Nature's wondrous gifts to us?

A born conservationist would be my Grandfather Samson. The only recollection I have of his ever interfering with the play of us children about his home in Atwood was when, in the gentlest manner, he once asked Hade and me not to climb into his fruit trees, patiently explaining that we might break the branches. About his earlier cabins, in Mackville, he had had almost as much of wildness as surrounded his boyhood home in southern Indiana.

He had soon followed the Merritts to Atwood, moving both his Lick-skillet business and the building it occupied over to the new town. Here, in a house purchased from Nobe Randall, he spent the remainder of his life. Here his widow lived after him, until Johnnie Merritt's family made it their home. It is from this period that I remember him.

Not inappropriate was his name of Samson, with its connotations: "distinguished, strong," "sun's man." In my clearest image of him he stands near the kitchen door, before a washstand and mirror, brushing his snowy hair and beard. Of his grayness he used to say, "I can't remember when I wasn't gray." His hair was white when he was still quite a young man. This grayness gave him the dignity of some Biblical patriarch. He was a rather big man, too. His face was comely, its only wrinkles the crow's-feet about his eyes, sign of his kindly nature. My mother says: "Pa had hardly any lines in his face when he died. Just a few when he smiled. He seldom laughed, just smiled. He had beautiful hands, with tapering fingers."

Grandfather Samson died when I was eight. I remember being taken by my mother to his bed, ~~of~~ seeing her lift the sheet, and ~~of~~ looking for the last time on his handsome, splendid countenance, framed in his immaculately groomed hair and beard. He has always seemed to me one of the truly noble. His most admirable quality, after his kindliness, was his philosophic temper. Someone has said of the androgynous Walt Whitman that his greatness lay largely in his inclination to accept much and reject little.

I think it was so with my grandfather. Without any great philosophical analysis, his nature, likewise androgynous and in many other respects like Whitman's, "accepted the Universe." I like to think of the following story, often told by his daughter, as being a homely, Emersonian symbol. "Once, when Pa was eating an apple, somebody said, 'Look out, you don't eat a worm.' Pa went on eating, and answered, 'Well, the worm's eating apple, too.'" When a neighbor asked him if he planted his potatoes in the full of the moon, he answered, "No, I plant mine in the ground."

His Atwood residence retained, while he lived, a certain wild charm. Besides the two big elms, there were beautiful maples and several oaks. Near the plum thicket was a large patch of spiderwort, with its inky flowers. I remember particularly the great pile of leaves that used to drift up against the woodshed and picket fence, giving the place a sylvan touch that I always associate with my grandfather — appropriate aura for this pioneer son of wooded Indiana. I think there may be some connection between this quality in him and my own great love of the woods. Or is my delight in the quiet seclusion of the wilderness an inheritance that may appear in any American whose ancestors dwelt in the shadow of the country's backwoods? — a sort of ancestral Skogsra that strives to allure us deeper into the forest, as it did the peasants of Lapland.

Whatever its origin, the wish to recover for myself some of our lost heritage became, through the years, so strong within me that I at last made definite efforts to realize it. A few years

ago, with a friend, I entered on a life that, to my own amazement, was not unlike that of the Conleys of early Coles County. Our eighty acres of wooded Oregon mountain land we called by the Irish phrase of "Back o' Beyond." Such success as I had in this venture may contain little of economic suggestion for the horde now growing more and more eager to "escape." There are, unfortunately, not enough such places to go round. But for me it proved a real escape. Here I had heart to laugh at Daniel Boone's remark to a friend, "Do you know that a man had the impudence to settle within forty mile of me!" In northwestern Oregon, I did at last find contentment in a little cabin situated in a sunny, sheltered cove in the fir-covered mountains. Here, in a country eternally green, with a beautiful creek leaping across the rugged width of my land, where deer and bear are still plentiful, here I found a rare happiness. At Back o' Beyond, ten miles from railroad, town, and highway, where Pig-Tail School is not very different from those my grandparents attended, and where my good neighbors live a life essentially like theirs, here I was once more <u>at home</u>. How Grandfather Samson would have loved this place! How my mother enjoyed her walks to the embowered spring and root-house, so like spots remembered from her childhood. After several years, I came to feel about "the outside" as early kin, dwelling in Illinois woods, felt about adjacent "opens." I became a rabbit in its homey burrow, part of my very habitat. Here was my true <u>oikos</u>, to a degree I had not known in any region other than that about my home in Illinois.

I like to think of this return of mine to the unspoiled woods

as a completion of an ancestral cycle, begun — who knows where? in "wild Wales"? in the back counties of pioneer Virginia? I believe it may have been more than the fulfillment merely of my personal inclinations. I rejoice that I see the same urge expressing itself in others of our clan who, not content with the nostalgic reminiscences of our elders, are bending their energies toward restoring some of the old for themselves and their children's children.

CHAPTER XXXIV

TREK'S END.

Anyone living at Atwood in 1900 would have scoffed at the idea that the time should ever come when there would be no Merritts there. Yet, in another decade practically every member of my grandfather's large family was gone. To-day, only an uncle and aunt remain. Those restless Americans, the Merritts, must move again — completing, on Pacific shores, the transcontinental pad begun by their first American voorlooper, at Norfolk, on the Atlantic.

My father used to torment us, just before our departure from Illinois, by playing solitaire and declaring "If I beat ol' Sol, we go to Californy. If I don't, we stay here." I think we younger Merritts were afraid he might sneak off to a California poker game, leaving the rest of us to rustle up our own fare.

About 1910, our immediate family had moved to Decatur, Illinois. I feel little inclination to speak of that not very happy interlude. I myself was away most of the time, teaching school at De Land and playing the piano in one of the early nickelodeons of Quincy, on the Mississippi. Here I was near a favorite, Aunt May, and her daughter, Bonnie. No doubt the moving-picture had by that time become so universal that these Quincy relatives would enjoy hearing my story of Aunt Annie Sipe at an earlier first "movie." Annie — we children never, in those days, called

her "Aunt" — had gone from Atwood to Decatur for the day and had there watched the flickering screen for the first time. Next day, in her account of this adventure to my mother, she said: "Why Dodie, when they get up out of a rockin'-chair, the chair keeps right on rockin'!" Only a year or two ago, one of my young neighbors at Back o' Beyond, on seeing his first cinema, reported: "They was a little dog in the picture, an' you could see his tail awaggin' just as natural!"

One day, I think in 1913, the last of our own group of Merritts crossed the Mississippi en route to California. Soon we were all settled within an hour's ride of San Francisco. My father now gets a job in the run-down establishment of an Oakland blacksmith. But the slipshod methods of his boss make him "fawnch at the bit. Why, I could get rich here!" He buys out his employer and builds up an excellent business, with the aid of Bud and Little John. These two continue faithfully with him, stopping only long enough to go to war. John is almost in the thick of it at the signing of the Armistice. Bud, after teaching horseshoeing to Negro lads in Georgia, also gets across.

And now their father makes money as never before. He and Dodie are soon riding about in a new automobile, "Mom" feasting on the California scenery, "Dad" listening to the perfect purr of the engine. Or "figgerin'." The new prosperity stimulates the poker urge in him, otherwise somewhat atrophied these days. "Why, I can build up a big machine-shop, get rich, make a million, if

this keeps up." These are boom days, and his friends advise him to do as they have done: buy stock in the Bank of Graustark, and retire to Piedmont. The poker player comes out in him. He invests in Graustark. Follows the Great Depression. As a petty gambler, he had had the reputation of being none too good a loser. But in this colossal game, in which he sits opposite opulent realtors, promoters, and bankers, he loses humbly and dispassionately. He now contents himself with nothing more hazardous than a quiet game of chess, with one of his grandsons. At this game he is still something of an adept, employing old tricks learned from "the boys" of Atwood, using, as he plays, the familiar phrases "Fish, or cut bait," "I'll take it if I never sell a peach."

Meanwhile, one of his sons, the family scribe, sits reading Paul de Kruif's Seven Iron Men, that inspiring saga of seven iron Merritts, with such striking resemblances to our own cousins, uncles, and grandfathers that one wonders if the two streams arose somewhere out of the same source. Just as de Kruif's Merritts must have won a spiritual victory through material defeat at the hands of powerful barons of finance, so has Johnnie Merritt learned, I trust, never again to sit in at a poker game with plutocrats. What matter, after all, if he continue in the old familiar rôle, with no "great lot of straw in his boots"? Better than wealth, at another's expense, a comfortable conscience and the right to say, "Well, throughout the depression, I've managed to hold my own. I've not saved much, but I've kept all my men at work, even when they was hardly enough work for 'em. I

kept three or four families goin', besides my own." And there has developed a more intimate outlet for his gambler's skill than the Bank of Graustark. The men folks organize a family poker club, of which Johnnie is the dean by right of his years and ability. And this is but one of several social activities of the growing clan.

The migration to California has been a rather remarkable one. Through five sons and five daughters, the tribe has increased until the time comes when there are thirty-three of us, every one of whom my mother sees almost daily in her Oakland home. This unusual settlement in one locality of so large a family, without a single exception, continued unbroken until after the golden wedding of our parents. Another extraordinary circumstance is this: throughout fifty-two years, there was not a single death, even of an infant. But sorrow came at last. For the first time we met, not in joyous celebration of Christmas, nor in an impromptu Saturday evening gathering, but in grief for the loss of one of our number. A little later, Death paid us a second visit. But it was not until my mother and father were in the sixtieth year of their married life that they experienced the third such sorrow, this time in its most poignant form, the passing of a little child, their grandson.

The patient Dodie wisely weighs these griefs against the many blessings. She resents her children's secret efforts to shield her from misfortune. Overhearing some loving offspring's "Poor Mommy!" she fights all such pity with these brave words: "'Poor Mommy,' your foot! . . . I'm an old woman For almost eighty years I've

known ups and downs. Don't you think I can take my share of trouble the rest of the way?"

And life goes on. New grandchildren and great-grandchildren, of the eighth generation of this record, arrive and are soon old enough to visit their grandpa's smithy, on the shore of San Francisco Bay. It is now their turn to be fascinated by the sparks from the Merritt anvil, just as it was their great-great-grandsire's to be thrilled, as a boy, in the Shenandoah Valley shop of his father's father.

There is one aspect of the Merritts' serving of the public that has not changed: its genuine democracy. Even to-day, when the shoeing of a farm horse is something of an event, there is no kow-towing to cranky urban customers here, any more than at Atwood. To these, Johnnie still gives an eloquently silent glance and goes about his business. And periodically come tales that the family's cocky bantamweight, Little John, has floored another importunate customer. Despite his size, he takes on the huskiest truck driver, and successfully, the chief element of his technique being that of surprise. For city dwellers do not expect such democratic denial that "the customer is always right" as these Merritts have brought from rural Illinois. There, in the old days, I remember, the local butcher used to greet us with "That's right! If I put the beef out, you want pork. Sure as I get my grinder all cleaned up, somebody comes in and asks for hamburger."

To-day, at eighty, Johnnie, with the gait and figure of a man of sixty, rises daily at seven, works enthusiastically if a

little less strenuously at his fine lathes and other modern machinery until five, when John and Bud have to drive him out of the shop. In the evening he stays up until ten or eleven, reading Sabatini, while Dodie, spending her sixtieth year at his side, reads volume after modern volume, satisfying her innate taste for good books. Her criticism often surprises and amuses me. Not even the dirt of contemporary novels greatly shocks her catholic views. Putting down in her little notebook, recently, the title of a particularly erotic tale, she said: "A few books like that would make a prostitute out of me — at my age!" Her appraisal of John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men was: "Well, when I got through with it, I thought more of his mice than his men!"

Sundays and holidays the two often spend on Bud's little Castro Valley ranch. This is a popular place, for it is, to many weary of city streets and offices, a bit of country living such as all but the youngest knew in Atwood. To the philosophers of the family, it is a welcome sign of a greatly needed return to closer contacting of the responsive earth. The reader who may have followed our saga to the end must have noted in almost all ramifications of our clan a tendency toward the life of the artisan. Of all my kin, very few were farmers and farmers only. But this once meant very little, for Johnnie, the village smith at Atwood, lived not so differently from his country patrons. But to be a city artisan, is another matter. To the writer, there is a warning for America in the sudden transformation, for example, of old agricultural Russia into the present régime, controlled not by the

tiller of the soil but by his less wholesome brother, the city worker. Any tendency — and I see many indications — toward a return of the urban artisan to at least somewhat of rural living seems, therefore, cause for rejoicing.

A few years ago, a former Illinois neighbor, whom Johnnie had not seen for several years, called at the new California shop, without being recognized. While my father worked busily at his forge, it occurred to George Miley to take up again some of Atwood's practical joking, which they both had long since put aside. George followed Johnnie about from task to task, asking impertinent questions. At last he inquired: "Could I get some bad mules shod here?" Johnnie answered, a little impatiently, "I guess you could. I been shoein' mules and horses for over fifty years." And it was not until George hinted that he was still hesitant about trusting his mules to this stranger that my father really looked up from his work — to behold an old friend.

Only the other day, a young stranger, after watching my father at his work for some time, said: "Well, why don't you spit tobacco juice on my bare feet? You used to, back in Atwood, Illinois. I'm Rankin Burke's boy."

Do the threads of life ever truly end? Is it not, rather, our incomplete awareness of them that makes them seem to terminate here or there, often to be resumed along some least expected portion of the way? A family chronicle has no beginning and no end.

Appearing out of the dark mist of years long dead, we trace it for a spell, to lose it again in the yet unrevealed future. Never completely broken is the cord. Never to more than a chapter do we mark

THE END.

ADDENDA A

THE ANCESTRY OF JOHN WILLIAM MERRITT.

John William Merritt, son of Irena (Conley) and Joseph Wilson Merritt, was born at Liberty settlement, Coles Co., Ill., Oct. 20, 1857. As a child, he went with his parents to Mackville ("Lickskillet"), near the present Atwood, Piatt Co., Ill. He was the village blacksmith at Mackville and, later, Atwood. He married Lola Mardula Samson at Mackville, Sept. 12, 1878. Their children, in order of birth, were: Nina Maude (m. Richd. A. Jolly), James Clinton (m. Maude Gibbs), Edith Blanche (m. Emory V. Hamilton), John Coleman (m. Bessie Mohr), Hazel Irene (m.: 1, Earl Anthony; 2, Robt. Brent Mitchell), Theo. Ellery, Herbert Leon (m. H. Ethel Stallsworth), Hester Mabel (m. Orrin H. Jones), Joseph Merrill (m. Caroline Ross), and Virginia Eleanor (m. Leon A. Morgan). After brief residence at Decatur, Ill., John William Merritt took his family to Oakland, Calif. In 1938, he and his wife celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

His great-grandfather is known to have been a blacksmith, also, in Va. Tradition says that the family's American origin was at, or near, Norfolk, as early as 1700. (Were they, perhaps, the Marots of that period and region?) By 1838, and probably much earlier, the group had settled near Staunton, Augusta Co., Va. At Churchville, near Staunton, in that year, resided a crossroads

blacksmith of the next generation, William Merritt, grandfather of John William. This William was born in Va. About 1854, he moved his family to Coles Co., Ill., where he farmed and continued to work as a blacksmith. After the death of his wife, he remarried. He is buried in Liberty Cemetery, in Coles Co. William may have had at least a brother, John, though this is not verified. The maiden name of the mother of William may have been Warwick or Warrick.

The first wife of William Merritt, and the mother of all his children, was Rachel Ann Fitzpatrick. She, also, was born in Va., Mar. 16, 1820. She died in Piatt Co., Ill., Sept. 28, 1872, and is buried in the Harshbarger Cemetery, near Atwood, Ill.

Rachel Ann was the daughter of Samuel and Ann (Sparks) Fitzpatrick. One of her descendants has stated that Ann's maiden name was Sparks. Yet the will of David Witt names: his wife, Sally; his sons, Dennett, Burgess, David, and William; and his daughters, Celia Oglesby, Linny Wade, Dicie Hamlet, and "Ann Sparks Fitzpatrick, wife of Samuel Fitzpatrick."

There were Fitzpatricks in Augusta Co. as early as 1737. They seem to have been part of a band of Scotch-Irish who accompanied Alex. Breckenridge to Pa., coming thence into Va.

Samuel and Ann (Sparks) Fitzpatrick were married (c.) June 18, 1792. Samuel preceded Ann in death. She remained a widow and died at the home of her son-in-law, William Merritt.

Augusta Co. records contain a settlement of Samuel Fitzpatrick's estate, 1833. In it are named: his wife Ann Sparks, David

Hupman, Wm. Johns, Francis Brown, David Thisher(?), Cloughs Fitzpatrick, David Fitzpatrick, Jeremiah Johns, Saml. Fitzpatrick, Rachel Fitzpatrick, and Burgess Fitzpatrick. The known children of Samuel and Ann Fitzpatrick were: Rachel Ann (m. Wm. Merritt), Saml. (m. Deborah Ann Bodkens), Barbara (m. Francis Brown), Jane (m. Jeremiah Johns), and Rebecca (m. Wm. Johns). (Were Cloughs, David, and Burgess Fitzpatrick also their children?)

A digression here leads to a clue, not yet established, to earlier generations of the John William Merritt line. For Rebecca Jane Johns, daughter of Rebecca (Fitzpatrick) and William Johns, above, married another William Merritt, whose ancestry has been determined, as follows. This William Merritt, born in Augusta Co., Feb. 2, 1820, was the son of Annie (Donahue) and Valentine Merritt. Valentine was the son of _____ (Overshiner?) and William Merritt, and the grandson of Samuel Merritt. It seems not unlikely that a portion of this Merritt line may be a direct, or at least a collateral, extension of the known ancestry of John William Merritt.

Rachel Ann (Fitzpatrick) and William Merritt had the following children: Joseph Wilson (m. Irena Conley), Saml. H. (m.: 1, Mary Eliza Smith; 2, _____ _____), Andrew W. (m. Nancy Harriet Rennels), Sarah Frances (m.: 1, Jefferson Fitzpatrick; 2, Isaac C. Harshbarger), John Wm. (m.: 1, Ollie Mae Fitzpatrick; 2, _____ _____), Rebecca Jane (m. Edmund Riley Johns), Otterbein, Eugenia, Martha Ann (m. Jack Walker), Silas Winchester (m. Belle _____), and three who died in childhood.

Of these, the children of William and Rachel Ann Merritt, the eldest son was Joseph Wilson, who was born at Churchville, Va., Oct. 28, 1838. He came, as a youth, with his parents, to Coles Co., Ill. Here he worked in the shop and on the farm of his father. He carried the mail, horseback, between Paris, Ill., and Monticello, Ill., 1857-61. On this star route he sometimes met Abraham Lincoln, then riding his law circuit. He served in Co. E, 25th Reg., Ill. Vol. Inf., throughout the Civil War. Captured at Chickamauga, he was a prisoner at Richmond, Danville, and Andersonville. During transfer, he escaped to the Northern lines. In Jan., 1857, he had married Irena Conley. About 1867 he moved his family over to Mackville, Piatt Co., Ill., where he opened a blacksmith-shop. In 1878 he moved business and residence to Atwood. Here, for many years, he was Justice of the Peace. Irena, his wife, died at Atwood, Apr. 1, 1901, and is buried in the Mackville Cemetery. He was twice remarried. He died at Atwood, Mar. 11, 1922, and is buried at Mackville. His widow, Inez Stitt Merritt, survived him.

Irena (Conley), first wife of Joseph W. Merritt, was born May 4, 1841. She was the great-granddaughter of John and Sarah (Wilson) Connelly. The former was born June 28, 1744. He came from Ireland to N. C. He died July 24, 1798. Sarah Wilson was born Oct. 20(?), 1746. She died July 12, 1824. Their children were: Polly, Effie, Cynthia, Wm. H., John, Elijah, Josiah (m.: 1, Mary Elizabeth Miller; 2, Sarah Elizabeth Terril; 3, Sarah Dixon),

Edmond, and Joel (m. Effie Pennington).

Of these children, it seems to have been John who became the grandfather of Irena, though this is not definitely known. Irena's father, John Conley -- as his immediate group, at least, now spelled the name -- came, about 1820-30, from N. C. to Ind., where he married Jane Rennels. They soon moved to Coles Co., Ill. Except for a period which he spent in Butler Co., Mo., John Conley spent the remainder of his life farming in Coles Co. Here he deeded land where old Liberty Church stood and where Liberty Cemetery was later laid out. He died here in 1888, and is buried at Liberty.

His wife, Jane, was the daughter of Nancy (Bland) and John Rennels. She was born in Ky., Nov. 27, 1812. She died in Coles Co., Ill., Apr. 14, 1874. She is buried in the Whetstone Cemetery, near Liberty.

The most reliable evidence indicates that John Rennels was born in Del., Feb. 17, 1781. The father of John seems to have come, possibly with a brother, from England or Ireland to Del. Here the elder Rennels died, killed by a falling tree. His widow and son John, then about five, moved to Lexington, Ky. John Rennels married Nancy Bland, July 25, 1805.

There is some uncertainty about Nancy's parentage. The most likely version is that her mother was Drucilla Ewing, her father _____ Tincher, and that Nancy later had a step-father, _____ Bland. It is known she had a half- or step-brother, William Bland. Nancy was born Jan. 14, 1787, some descendants believe

in Ireland, of Scotch descent, others in Ky.

John and Nancy Rennels, after long residence in Ky., moved: to Ind., c. 1826; from Lawrence Co., Ind., to near Rockville, Parke Co., Ind.; and thence to Coles Co., Ill., in 1837, following their son, James, to the so-called "Rennels Settlement," near Salisbury, in Coles, whither James had come in 1822. John Rennels died at "Stringtown," near Salisbury, Aug. 12, 1866. His widow, Nancy, died at the home of her daughter, Jane Conley, in Coles Co., Dec. 26, 1867.

The children of John and Nancy Rennels, in order of birth, were: James (m. Polly Connelly, daughter of Joel and Effie Pennington Connelly, above), Anna (m. _____ Casner), Mary (m. Martin Gilbert), Jane (m. John Conley), Wm. Harrison (m. Susan Ingram), _____ (an infant daughter), Thos. Scott (m. Susan Stone), Elizabeth (m. Arthur Ingram), Sarah, Armilda (m. Wm. Stone), John (m.: 1, _____ Brown; 2, _____ Brown), Nancy, and Martin (m. _____ Letner).

The children of Jane (Rennels) and John Conley were: Sarah Ann, Elijah P. (m. Lucinda Davis), Elizabeth (m. C. Perry Davis), Nancy (m. Franklin Johns), Cynthia (m. James Moore), Armilda (m. Arthur Ingram), Irena (m. Joseph Wilson Merritt), Mary Jane (m. John Strader), James R., Susan (m. John A. Horsley), Wm. Taylor (m. Mary Elizabeth Brooks), and John (m. Kate Busic).

The children of Irena (Conley) and Joseph Wilson Merritt, in order of birth, were: John William (m. Lola Mardula Samson), Sarah Ann (m. Robt. C. Sipe), Orpheus, Lillian Dazella (m. Vinton Garrett), Elmer Otto (m. Alice McDonald), May (m. David W. Humper),

Silas Bert (m. Retta Gosnell), Claude Melnotte (m. Flora Smith), Lola, and Zeph Bell (m. Bertha Marshall).

ADDENDA B

THE ANCESTRY OF LOLA MARDULA (SAMSON) MERRITT.

Lola Mardula Samson, daughter of Eliza Jane (Robbins) and James Apperson Samson, was born at Mackville, Piatt Co., Ill., Sept. 1, 1861. She married John William Merritt, Sept. 12, 1878.

Her great-grandfather was John Sampson. He was born in N. Y. Most descendants believe that the Sampsons came from England, or possibly Scotland. John Sampson married Betsy Epperson. She was born in Wales. At least one of their children, Benjamin, was born in Va.

Tradition says that John and Betsy Sampson met death at the hands of the Indians. Of the party attacked, it is said that only their son, Benjamin, and his wife, Martha (Charles) Sampson, survived, these escaping to Lexington, Ky. Martha and Benjamin were (first?) cousins, Martha's father being _____ Charles and her mother _____ Sampson. (Was the latter a sister to John Sampson?)

Benjamin and Martha Sampson were married in Va., of which both were natives. From Ky. they moved up into southern Ind., some of their descendants settling later in Knox Co., Ill. Benjamin is known to have had a second cousin, Josiah, who came from England and settled in adjacent Fulton Co., Ill. Of one Josiah Heath Sampson, who lived in Fulton Co. — whether the same Josiah or another, it is not certain — the following lineage has been established. He was the son of Richd. Hill Sampson, the grandson

of Richd. Sampson of London, Eng., and the great-grandson of Benj. Franklin Sampson, who died in Eng. This line and the John Sampson one were doubtless related, if not, in part, identical.

In addition to Benjamin (m. Martha Charles), John and Betsy (Epperson) Sampson had Ephraim (m. Martha Apperson), at least two other sons, and possibly Jane and another daughter.

Of these, Ephraim Samson was the grandfather of Lola Samson Merritt. He was born, in Va. or Ky., Apr. 2, 1801. He preceded his brother, Benjamin, to Ind., settling at Paris, Jennings Co. Here he ran a woolen mill from about 1825 to 1865. His first wife was Martha Apperson. There is some traditional evidence that they were cousins. After her death, Mar. 28, 1857, he married Jane J., the widow of _____ Wright. They lived for a period at Mackville, Piatt Co., Ill. Ephraim Samson returned to Paris, Ind., however, where he died, Aug. 8, 1871, at the home of his daughter, Nancy Jones.

His first wife, Martha Apperson, was born in Va., Nov. 30, 1799. She was the daughter of Sally (Cook) and James Apperson. The latter was born July 28, 1773. He died Feb. 16, 1841. His wife, Sally, had preceded him, passing away Dec. 6, 1839. Besides their daughter, Martha, James and Sally (Cook) Apperson apparently had a son, Isaac H., and possibly another, James. It is probable that the elder James Apperson was of the group of that name who settled in New Kent Co., Va., some of them before 1700, as shown by the register of St. Peter's Parish. It seems likely that there was kinship between Martha Apperson and Betsy Epperson Sampson, whose

son, Ephraim, Martha married. Both forms of the name appear on the St. Peter's register.

The children of Ephraim and Martha (Apperson) Samson were, in order of birth: Judith Elizabeth, Sarah Ann (m. John N. Terril), James Apperson (m. Eliza Jane Robbins), Rebecca Jane, Harriet Smith, Nancy Law (m. Wm. Jones), Francis Marion (m.: 1, _____ _____; 2, Sarah Barker; 3, _____ _____), Maria Eliza (m. Hood Whitsitt), and Emma.

Of these, James Apperson Samson was born at Paris, Jennings Co., Ind., Aug. 23, 1826. As a young man he adventured down the Mississippi, returning to Ind., where he married Eliza Jane Robbins, about 1853. Having become an expert saddler, he opened up a shop at Lexington, Ind. About 1856-7, he took his family to the pioneer village of Mackville, in Piatt Co., Ill. Except for a short residence at Arcola, Douglas Co., Ill., he spent the rest of his years at Mackville and Atwood, Ill. His first wife died c. 1867. He then married Susan Caroline Boyle, daughter of Judge _____ Boyle, of Louisville, Ky. James and Susan Samson had a son, James, who died in infancy. James Apperson Samson died at Atwood, Apr. 22, 1898. He is buried in the Mackville Cemetery.

His first wife, Eliza Jane Robbins, seems to have been born in Ky., her father, Nathaniel Robbins, ~~having come to southern Ind. before the Civil War.~~ She is thought to have been of French descent. There is ~~vague tradition that her father served in the Northern army, became an officer, and may have died in the service. His widow, mother of Eliza Jane,~~ Her mother, Rosa Young Robbins, was living at Lexington, Ind., after the

war. Eliza Jane Robbins had brothers, one of them named Elisha. (Another, William?) Some of these are said to have pioneered and remained in the Far West. One may have died in the Confederate service. Eliza Jane had at least two sisters: Elizabeth (m. _____ Doolittle) and Emmaretta (m. Isaac Brinkworth). Eliza Jane Samson is buried in the Moore Cemetery, near Mackville, Ill.

The children of Eliza Jane (Robbins) and James Apperson Samson, in order of their birth, were: Mary Eleanor (m. Solon T. Harrod), Rose, Lola Mardula (m. John William Merritt), and Emmaretta.

ADDENDA C, TO CHAPTER "WESTWARD"

The following is taken from various sources, but chiefly from a manuscript, The Stone Generations, by Doctor W. W. Stone, son of Napoleon and Mary Ann (Connelly) Stone:

Stephen Stone's old homestead was a brick house near the present Charleston, Illinois, the Five Mile House, where he died. He lies buried in the old Stringtown graveyard. Napoleon, son of Stephen Stone, was born in the Five Mile House, in 1836. He married Mary Ann, daughter of Arberry (Walker) and Joel Jackson Connelly. The latter was the son of Joel and Effie (Pennington) Connelly.

In 1858, Napoleon Stone and wife loaded all their household effects into a wagon to which were hitched two splendid horses, and started on their way to the frontier of Texas. It appears that no one else started with them, but they found plenty of company on the way. In about six weeks they reached the home, on Sandy Creek, near the present Decatur, Texas, of Joel Jackson Connelly, who had preceded them. The country was full of game: deer, turkey, an occasional buffalo. Not long after Napoleon Stone's arrival in Texas, he located a homestead six or seven miles northwest of Decatur (then called Taylorville), on a hill overlooking a great expanse of country.

He was later employed by the Government to keep a stage stand at Phantom Hill, in western Texas. This stage line had been

established during the gold excitement in California. It was a dangerous route of travel because of hostile Indians, being situated more than a hundred miles west of any settlements. Here great herds of buffalo roamed and grazed. Napoleon Stone held this stand until the Civil War broke out, when it was discontinued. The last trip the stage made, Mr. Stone and family took passage for their home in Wise County.

In 1864 he enlisted in Company B, Montague County, First Frontier District, Texas State Troops. He spent most of the time till the close scouting on the frontier, helping to keep back the Indians. He preferred that to fighting for the Confederacy. The strife ended, he was among those loyal citizens who first hoisted the stars and stripes over the court house at Weatherford, Parker County, Texas. He later helped to found the town of Carterville.

Indian depredations continued until 1874 or '75, when, by the stationing of State Rangers along the frontier, these raids were at last checked. Having returned, about 1869, to Wise County, the Stones here witnessed the stealing of horses by the Indians, the balls from whose guns fell into their very dooryard. During these dangerous times, Joel Jackson Connelly and his son-in-law, Carlo Ball, built the first flour- and saw-mill in Wise County, just off the Gainesville road, near Decatur. To obtain the machinery, Jackson Connelly made a trip to New York and had it shipped to Louisiana, where it was hauled overland to Texas.

In 1883, "Nap" Stone and family moved to Oregon. Now a

widower, he located in Methow Valley, Washington. After pioneering here, he returned to Texas. In 1910 he passed away, in his sleep.

The following is an excerpt from Indian Depredations in Texas, by J. W. Wilbarger (The Steck Co., Austin, Tex., 1935, "a facsimile reproduction" of Indian Depredations in Texas . . ., Hutchings Printing House, Austin, Tex., 1889). On pp. 439ff., appears an account of the death of Harrison Riley ("Tip" or "Lip") Connelly, son of Joel Jackson Connelly. Wilbarger quotes Captain R. B. Barry, of Bosque County, Texas:

"As the (Texas) State Convention that passed the ordinance of secession saw proper to place troops on our frontier after the Federal forces had retired, they ordered Colonel Henry E. McCulloch to proceed at once to the front and take charge of the fort, then occupied by United States soldiers. A portion of my company was at that time encamped on the head of Hubbard's creek, and was ordered out by Governor Houston while I was absent on a scout. Subsequently they were transferred to the Confederate service. When I returned, I found myself in command of a company in the First Texas cavalry, under Colonel McCulloch. Our regiment was stationed in detachments from Red river to the Rio Grande. . . .

"The first scout of any importance was ordered by Major Burleson, who directed me to meet him at a certain big spring on Red river, nearly a day's ride above the Wichita mountain. The night before the morning on which I was to start, an express came in, stating that ten of my men whom I had sent to escort some wagons

from Camp Cooper, on the Brazos, to Gooch's ranch, on Red river, had been badly used by the Indians between the Red Fork of the Brazos and Little Wichita, forty-five miles from Camp Cooper, where I was then stationed. . . .

"We will now relate what occurred after we came up with these Indians, two days subsequent to the fight just described. Their force had been increased to about one hundred warriors, and they were making their way toward the settlements. Willie Biffle, who was a long way from the command on the right flank, came in and reported Indian signs. I halted the command and sent twelve men back after the pack mules that had stampeded. They had scarcely gone out of sight over the divide when we heard firing. We hurried to their relief, but not in time to save three of the twelve men from being killed and others wounded. A general fight then ensued. After a short time, the Indians began to fall back, notwithstanding they had three to our one. The fight extended over some ten or twelve miles of ground across the divide, and between the Little Wichita and the Red Fork of the Brazos. Whenever we became somewhat scattered in the chase the Indians would turn and check our advance for a while. They were well armed and equipped and wore a great many savage ornaments. . . . As soon as they perceived that their chief was wounded, his warriors rallied around him and moved him away.

"Many of our men who were on slow horses had fallen behind, but coming up just then with loaded guns they soon set the Indians

traveling again.

"We lost three killed in this fight, to wit, Thomas J. Weathersby, Lip Conley and Bud Lane. Two men were wounded. We only killed seven of the Indians that we know of. The next morning our horses were so stiff that we had to help them upon their feet. Lieutenant Bushong's horse was unable to stand, and we were compelled to leave him, expecting he would be devoured by wolves, but when we returned to camp we found him there. We buried our comrades with our butcher knives, placing their bodies in a deep buffalo trail, and carrying earth in our blankets to cover them, from the nearest bluff, where it was readily scooped out. After we had thus covered their bodies as well as we could with earth, we laid heavy stones on top of all, to prevent wolves from scratching them up. This was in July, 1861. . . . "

Even earlier than these Texan adventures were those, in the Far West, of William Morgan, son of Josiah Connelly. The latter was a brother of the elder Joel, who married Effie Pennington. Joel and Josiah were sons of John and Sarah (Wilson) Connelly, ancestors of the present writer.

Born in Lawrence County, Indiana, in 1822, William Morgan Connelly came with his father to Clark County, Illinois, as a lad. I find a brief account of his life in the History of Crawford and Clark Counties, Illinois, edited by William Henry Perrin (O. L. Baskin & Co., Chicago, 1883), pp. 148 and 456. He "made several trips to California, first in 1849, going with an

ox team, which required six months, returning in 1851. In 1859, he went out to Pike's Peak," driving a barefoot mule team, "and was one of the delegates that assisted in organizing the Territory." This may indicate that he had a hand in the creation of "Jefferson Territory," as that abortive adventure in statecraft was called. A contemporary emigrants' guide by Henry Villard, The Past and Present of the Pike's Peak Gold Regions, first published in 1860, and reprinted by the Princeton University Press, in 1932, with Introduction and Notes by LeRoy R. Hafen, gives a vivid account of the Pike's Peak rush and of the formation of "Jefferson." Whatever may have been young Connelly's part in the latter, he must have witnessed and experienced most of the colorful aspects of life in that region during the year 1859. "In 1864, he organized a company of men and went to Idaho and California, and in 1867, made another trip to Pike's Peak, this time taking five men." He returned to his old home, however, and became a successful farmer, at one time holding 1200 acres of land near Westfield, Illinois.

His half-brother, Richard Madison Connelly, likewise made a journey to Montana, with team and wagon, in 1864, but, like his brother, returned to Illinois — "the State like an arrow."

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